

# OpenTheo

## **Matthew 5:27 - 5:37: Adultery, Divorce, and Oaths (Part 1)**



### **Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg**

In this message, Steve Gregg delves into Matthew 5:27-37, where Jesus discusses adultery, divorce, and oaths. Gregg explains that just as anger is akin to murder, so too is lustful looking akin to adultery. He underscores the gravity of sexual sin and stresses the importance of guarding against lustful desires. He also cautions against behaving unjustly towards others and highlights the need to make amends quickly when one has wronged another.

### **Transcript**

We'll continue our studies in the Sermon on the Mount. In our last two sessions, we examined the verses 17-20, which I told you is an introduction to the remainder of Chapter 5, and it's possible that it's an introduction to the rest of the whole sermon. The key phrase there being, in verse 20, For I say to you that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

And the remaining portion of the sermon basically talks about what kind of righteousness God is looking for, what kind of righteousness does in fact exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. And at first he begins by talking in terms of the law, because the Jews, of course, would understand naturally the law as the basis for understanding God's righteous requirements. What it means to be righteous is to fulfill the law of God.

And Jesus does not disagree with that. As he said in verse 17, he did not come to destroy the law, he came to fulfill it. And in the remainder of this chapter, there are six examples that Jesus gives of how the law is best to be understood as a guide to righteousness.

And in the close of our last session, I mentioned that these six examples divide into three couplets, it appears to me. Each of them drawing out a particular principle. And the three principles that are found in these six examples are the principles of justice, and of mercy, and of faithfulness.

Now, in the arrangement in this chapter, it is really in this order, justice, faithfulness, and

mercy. But Jesus, on another occasion, in Matthew 23.23, said, The weightier matters of the law are justice, and mercy, and faithfulness. And we know that the weightiest matter of the law, or the whole of the law, is to love.

To love your neighbor as yourself. He that loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law, Paul said. And Jesus himself, later in the sermon, said, if you do to others what you would have them do to you, then this is the whole law and the prophets.

So the whole of the law is subsumed in a single statement, and that is, love your neighbor as yourself. And as I sought to point out in our last session, love, beyond being a feeling that we have toward people, is something we do toward people. And the principles upon which we dictate our conduct toward other people, that makes it loving conduct, are the principles of justice, and of mercy, and of faithfulness.

And insofar as we are behaving in these ways, we are being loving. If we are not behaving justly, or we are not behaving mercifully, or we are not behaving faithfully, we are not behaving in love. And so the whole of the law is to love.

This is something that, of course, most of the Pharisees didn't understand. Some recognized it when they were told, as in the case of the scribe who asked Jesus what the great commandment was, and he said, well, the first in great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. And the second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

And the scribe actually said, you've spoken well, Master, because to love the Lord and to love your neighbor as yourself is greater than all the sacrifices and burnt offerings. And Jesus said to that scribe, you're not far from the kingdom of God. Because that man, though a Pharisee, recognized when he was told what the core value of the law was, and what God was really looking for when he gave the law.

The law is simply so many expressions of how people behave when they are behaving in the love of God toward each other. And this was missed by most of the teachers of the law, or at least it was not emphasized, or it was not lived. And therefore, the disciples, having grown up under the influence of the Phariseic religious norms, would have not properly understood what God was looking for, and most Jews did not.

They believed that the Pharisees were the best folks around because they kept the law to the letter outwardly. Most people didn't have the time or the education to know how to do that. And so they just figured that the Pharisees were the most righteous people around.

And the best way that they could be righteous is to avoid themselves external scandals of sin. Now, Jesus gives examples of laws and teachings that they have heard taught from the law, and then he gives his own take on the same subject. What I believe you

will find, if you observe it, is that when he gives his take, he points out that in addition to what they were taught, not replacing what they were taught, but in addition to it, there is a deeper issue.

And what they were taught is true, but, at least in some cases it was true, not in every point. Though true, it was true for a deeper reason than they understood. Let me read to you verses 21 through 26, where we have the first example.

Jesus said, You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the counsel.

But whoever says, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him. Lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid the last penny.

Now, there are a number of things in this teaching that are difficult in a way, the way they are worded, and have been misunderstood, I think, a fair bit. Essentially, most people, when they come to this passage, they get the basic idea that, well, not only is it wrong to murder, it's wrong to have murderous intentions, a murderous attitude, to be angry. And that, of course, is true, that is the essential thought.

But there is something even more essential in it. What do all of these things have in common? First of all, he introduces it by reference to the command, You shall not murder, which obviously is the sixth commandment in the law of the Ten Commandments. But what do these other things have to do with each other? Being angry, well, we can easily see a connection there, being angry with your brother.

Many people, when they murder, do so out of anger. But when it gets to calling your brother raka, and calling your brother fool, and then leaving your gift at the altar to go and reconcile with your brother, and reconciling with your adversary while you're on the way to court with him, before he turns you over to the judge, what do these things all have in common? Are they all miscellaneous teachings? Well, they're all given in one block of teaching as part of his explanation of God's heart and what God was getting at when he said, You shall not murder. And the Pharisees had made two mistakes.

It's an interesting thing. They had put two ideas together, both true, but put together in

such a way as to convey a false impression. They had said, You shall not murder, which of course was in the Scripture, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.

That is also taught in the Old Testament Scripture. The judgment, however, in the Scripture and in the teaching of the Pharisees, did not mean what we think of as the judgment. When we think of the judgment, we're thinking of Judgment Day.

We're thinking of the Great White Throne. We're thinking of the end of the world, where individuals are reviewed, their lives are reviewed, and they're consigned to their eternal destiny one way or the other. The judgment here referred to is the judgment of the magistrate.

In the Book of Numbers, it refers to this fact that the murderer will be subject to the judgment of the magistrate. And so, the Pharisees and the rabbis taught that people better not murder, because if they do, they will have to stand condemned by the magistrate and be put to death. But in saying so, they were giving two false impressions.

One is that the only penalty a person would face for murder was a legal penalty. And therefore, it was a legalistic approach, that you would face the court if you did this kind of a crime, and you don't want to face the court and suffer death. But they did not emphasize the fact that this was a breach of a relationship with God, that there is a higher court, there is a higher judgment, a higher concern involved in why you do or do not commit murder.

It is not simply a matter of legalism. It's not just simply a matter of avoiding legal penalties. There's more to it than that, as Jesus brings out.

But there's more, and that is that murder itself is an extreme crime. And everybody knows that a person who commits murder should suffer something for it. But many lesser things that are in principle in the same category with murder are also offensive to God at a similar level.

I didn't say at an equal level. Some people do say that. Some people say that anger is as bad as murder.

Or when they deal with the next one, in verse 27, that lust is as bad as adultery. Well, at one level it is, at another level it's not. If you're angry with your brother and you murder him, you've done worse than if you're angry at your brother and you don't murder him.

The anger is bad in both cases, very bad. But if you go further and kill the guy, you've done something even worse. Obviously, if you have murder in your heart, that interferes with your relationship with God.

That's a sin before God, but it'll never get you killed by the magistrate. You'll never be subject to the judgment of the corpse, just for having anger in your heart, in all

likelihood. But if you go ahead and commit murder, you not only have sinned against God, you've also sinned against another person in a way that will do harm, not only to that person, but to his loved ones and to his dependents and things like that.

It is not right to say that anger is equal to murder. Jesus is not saying that. I'll tell you what he is saying, if I understand him correctly, in a moment.

Likewise, he's not saying that lust is just as bad as adultery, although many people say it that way. Jesus doesn't say quite that. It is true.

It is adultery in the heart. And we'll talk about that, actually, probably next session, not this session more. But the point is that if you have adultery in the heart, that's bad.

If you go out and commit physical adultery, that's a second bad. That's two bad things. Two bad things are worse than one bad thing.

And to commit adultery is to injure other parties as well. If you have adultery in your heart, you injure yourself and your relationship with God, that's bad. If you go further and injure somebody else and defile somebody else, that's double bad.

And so I'm not one of those who's going to interpret Jesus as saying that all these things are equally bad. But I am going to say, and I understand Jesus to be saying, that there are other things that are bad for the same reason that murder is bad and that adultery is bad. They may not be as grievous.

They may not involve one in quite as much heinous crime. But they are bad in the same way and for the same reason. And if your concern is with your relationship with God, as it should be, then you will be concerned not only about the things that you would do that would outwardly subject you to the judgment of the magistrate.

You'll be concerned about those things that are in the same category as far as God is concerned, which may not subject you to any penalties from the magistrate, but are as offensive to God anyway. That they displease God for the same reason that murder does. Now, what are these things? He first says, I say to you that whoever is angry at his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

Now, what he had quoted to them that they'd already heard is that whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. So he just takes that last line, will be in danger of the judgment, from what they've already heard, and substitutes murder for being angry at your brother without a cause. And says that same thing is something that will subject a person to judgment.

Now, there's difficulty here because it is not true, probably, that just being angry at your brother will subject you to the judgment of a court of law. And so Jesus seems to be shifting here the meaning of judgment, because to the Pharisee, being subject to the

judgment, was the judgment seat, the Sanhedrin, the court. And Jesus uses the same phrase, but he's probably shifting the meaning.

There is a higher judgment. Eventually he describes it as the danger of hellfire at the end of verse 22. It's the judgment of God.

So Jesus begins by indicating there's another judgment that a person needs to be concerned about being subject to. And it may be that the judgment of the Sanhedrin will never condemn you for being angry, but there is a judgment that you need to be concerned about, which will. And that same judgment will condemn you for saying raka to your brother or for calling him a fool.

Now, this passage, verse 22, I want to consider because there are three seemingly independent statements. Number one, whoever is angry at his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment. Number two, whoever says to his brother raka, which means worthless person, shall be in danger of the council, which means the Sanhedrin.

And three, whoever says you fool shall be in danger of hellfire. Now, there's something that all three of these statements have in common. They all say whoever does something will be in danger of something.

So whoever does A will be in danger of B. But in each sentence the A changes and in each case the B changes. Now, there's two things you need to know to get any sense out of this sentence or these three sentences. And they both have to do with the Hebrew style of speaking.

One of these is the Hebrew parallelism. Jesus, not infrequently, used poetic forms of speech in Hebrew parallelism. When Jesus said, what is the kingdom of heaven like and to what shall we liken it? He said the same thing twice.

Or when he said, don't cast your pearls before swine or give what is holy to dogs. This is parallelism. Two statements that mean the same thing essentially.

You find it in the Psalms all the time. You see it in Hebrew poetry everywhere. That's the major feature of Hebrew poetry.

And I believe we have here a three-pronged poetic device. He says sort of the same thing three times but gives a different bit of light on it each time he repeats it. You've heard that if a person murders, he'll be in danger of the judgment.

Well, let me tell you. If you're angry at your brother without a cause, you'll be in danger of the judgment. In fact, if you call your brother a raka, you'll be in danger of the counsel.

Now, I take the counsel and judgment to be parallel. And although counsel to the

Pharisee would normally mean the Sanhedrin, I believe Jesus is here simply using parallel to judgment earlier. I think he's referring to a higher judgment, a higher counsel, a higher accountability, and that is to God.

But notice there's been a change. In Hebrew parallelism, sometimes the second member of the poem will add something the first one didn't have or substitute it in order to give another angle to it. Here to say the first sentence, whoever is angry at his brother without a cause should be in danger of the judgment.

Whoever says rocker shall be in danger of the counsel. If counsel and judgment are the same thing, then the change is in from being angry to saying rocker. You'll have the same penalty, whether you are angry at your brother without a cause or whether you call him rocker, which means worthless fellow.

And then the last one is whoever says thou fool, and I think that thou fool and rocker are essentially parallel too, shall be in danger of hellfire. Now, here he's modified the last part of the sentence. I wish I could illustrate what I'm thinking here.

I don't know if I can because we're making a tape. I don't know if I can adequately do this. But he's got, okay, whoever A will experience B. Well, then he changes it to A. Now, let's take this all free here.

Here's the structure of these three sentences. Whoever does A shall experience B. B is the same thing in the first two, and A is the same thing in the second two. What I mean is, this is how he structures his discussion.

Angry at your brother, in danger of judgment. Whoever says rocker shall be in danger of the same thing, the judgment. Whoever does the same thing as saying rocker, that is, says thou fool, will be in danger of hellfire.

So that the thought flows from the idea of being angry, you'll be subject to the judgment. But being angry is equivalent to saying rocker, which is equivalent to saying fool, and the judgment is equivalent to hellfire. Now, that is, I don't pretend that isn't confusing.

It's the way his thought is structured in this poetic paradigm. That he's trying to say there's two things, really, in this sentence that are sort of like murder in their own way. One is being angry at your brother without a cause.

The other is saying rocker or fool to your brother. Now, these behaviors subject a person to judgment, to a counsel. But that counsel is a greater counsel than the Sanhedrin.

It is actually one whose judgment is hellfire. So it is obviously the judgment of God that is in view here. Now, that is probably more easily understood by the disciples than it is by us, because of the form of speech that was not unusual method for a rabbi or for a Hebrew person to express himself.

To us that is peculiar to say it in those three sentences that way. But the essential thought of that whole thing is that your attitude toward your brother, if it is angry without a cause, if it is contemptuous and abusive in language, all these things are in their own way akin to murder. And the judgment for murder and for these similar things is greater than you think.

It may not be that you who do these things in your heart, or who say these things with your mouths, you may not suffer at the hands of the earthly Sanhedrin, but you will suffer at a higher court, at a higher counsel. And that counsel will subject you to hellfire, not just execution as in the case of a murderer. And so what he is doing is two things.

They have said that whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. That is true. But let us talk not only about murder.

Let us talk about other things of the same type. And let us talk about the judgment. It is not just what you think.

It is a greater judgment than you think. He, at one time, amplifies on what crimes will be subject to judgment, and amplifies on what that judgment is. Now, let us talk about the peculiar parts of it.

I think that we have another thing to consider here to understand properly, and that is the use of hyperbole. I have a book by a guy named Dr. Robert H. Stein called *Difficult Sayings of Jesus*. I think that is what it is, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels*.

And it is a study, a scholarly study, of the use of hyperbole in the teaching of Jesus. And this man gives many examples where Jesus clearly is using hyperbole. And then he speaks about other cases where it is not so clear whether Jesus is or not.

And he assigns, I think, something like 16 different rules to decide whether hyperbole is being used or not. Things like if you took them literally, it makes absolutely no sense at all. Or if you took it literally, it contradicts what Jesus said elsewhere.

Or if you take it literally, it contradicts the way Jesus lived or acted. Or if you take it literally, it violates some Old Testament higher principle or something like that. You know, I mean, there is a whole bunch of rules like that.

If something, when taken literally, if there is some severe theological problem with doing so, based on other scripture or Jesus' other teachings or behavior or the Apostles' teachings, then there is a likelihood that it is not to be taken literally and that it is a hyperbole. And what that book demonstrated to me when I read it years ago, I was very helpful, it showed how frequently Jesus uses hyperbole. And that is a very important thing to note as we read the Sermon on the Mount.

When Jesus talks about cutting off your hand or plucking out your eye, there are people



who have taken that literally and done similar things to that. And they did not recognize that Jesus was not literally advocating that kind of self-mutilation. But there are other parts of the Sermon that people don't as easily recognize as hyperbole.

Yet there is hyperbole here. That phrase, without a cause, whoever is angry at his brother without a cause, just those three words, without a cause, are not found in some of the manuscripts. They are not found in the Alexandrian text.

And for that reason, those who favor the Alexandrian text do not think they were authentic. They think they were added by some copyist somewhere down the line, so that they entered into the textus receptus. Now, no one can say for sure.

It is impossible to know at this stage, with the evidence available, whether Jesus actually inserted that phrase or did not, because some manuscripts include it, some omit it. But I will say this. If it is omitted, and Jesus simply said, whoever is angry at his brother shall be in danger of the judgment, then we have here a hyperbole, the actual meaning of which is made more clear, by the addition of without a cause.

Now, whether Jesus himself said without a cause in order to be more clear, or whether some copyist put it in, I don't know. But whether it actually was part of Jesus' original statement or not, it is implied. Jesus could not simply have said, whoever is angry at his brother shall be in danger of the judgment, and meant it in an absolutely literal sense.

Because Jesus himself got angry. And so did Paul, and so did others. We read of Jesus being angry.

And if all anger, without modification of that comment, if all anger is in itself sin, then Jesus would have been guilty of sin, and of course this cannot be the case. In Mark chapter 3, verse 5, Jesus was in the synagogue, and it says, So when he looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. This is the man with the withered hand.

But Jesus looked out on the Pharisees, his critics, with anger. Now, anger was in Jesus. Jesus was sinless.

Therefore, not all anger is sin. And the apostle makes that clear also. In Ephesians chapter 4, in verse 26, Paul said, Be angry and do not sin.

He actually was quoting there from Psalm 4.4, when he said, Be angry and do not sin. But then Paul makes his own comment, Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. Now, you have wrath.

That's anger. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Why didn't he just say, Don't ever get angry? Why didn't he ever say, Don't ever have wrath? If being angry is a sin, why didn't Paul just forbid being angry? He said, Be angry, but do not sin.

When you have wrath, do not retain it. Do not let the sun go down on it. Now, Jesus was angry.

Paul said there's such a thing as being angry and not sinning. And therefore, if Jesus simply said, Whoever is angry at his brother shall be in danger of the judgment, then I believe we would have to take that as a hyperbole. That in most cases, perhaps the vast majority of cases, anger is sinful.

But there would be exceptions. There would be times when it is not. And whether Jesus made this exception by saying, Without a cause, as it reads in the King James and the New King James, or whether that was added later, that statement nonetheless is a valid gloss on the general comment about anger.

It is not all anger that is sinful. It is being angry without reasonable cause. Now, the reason I'd say there's additional, another reason I know there's hyperbole here is that he says, Whoever says, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Well, Jesus himself called people fools. To the two men on the road to Emmaus, he says, O fools in slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have said. And to the Pharisees, Jesus says, O fools and blind.

Even Paul referred to the Galatians as foolish Galatians. Now, to call someone a fool, literally, is not always a sin, or else Jesus sinned. He called people fools.

Some of them were disciples. Some of them were Pharisees. The Apostle referred to some Christians as fools.

Certainly, that is calling your brother fool. Was Jesus in danger of hell fire? Was Paul? I think not. Again, we have to say we have hyperbole here.

But I want to always emphasize that a hyperbole is an exaggeration which is made for the sake of emphasis. A lot of times, if I say, Well, that's exaggerated. That would be taken to discount the validity of what is said.

Oh, that's an exaggeration. But with hyperbole, it is not so. You cannot say, Oh, because it's an exaggeration, its importance is small.

No, a hyperbole is an exaggeration for the point of emphasizing how important the point is. But it overstates it in terms of literal application. It is an extremely important point that if you are angry at your brother unjustly, you are doing something that is akin to murder.

It is wrong for the same reason that murder is wrong. And we'll talk in a moment about what that reason is. And that if you call your brother a fool, in other words, if you have an abusive, contemptuous attitude toward your brother in your heart or expressed with

your mouth, then this is akin to murder also.

You know, people don't always murder out of anger. Some people are just cold-blooded, you know, hired guns, you know, people who are hitmen. They're not angry when they kill people, but it's murder.

Well, what is it then? People kill either out of anger or out of contempt. And by contempt we mean by not giving a person any sense, I mean, by not evaluating a person as a valuable person. If you think, well, this person is better off dead or the world would be a better place without this person, your decision is based on the fact that you see no value in that person.

He's worthless. I mean, the hitman who has no anger but just shoots someone because someone else wants him dead and will pay for it, that hitman values that person less than he values his pay. He does not place value on the person.

He does not even probably consider this person might have a wife or children who would be for a very long time grieved, maybe parents and other loved ones, maybe there's other people dependent on him. Maybe that person is, of course, a hitman would not be expected to think this way, but maybe this person is someone that God has, you know, a special niche in His program for that person to fulfill. But to murder someone requires that you just sweep from your consciousness all sense of any value of that person to anyone, to God or to anyone else.

That person just doesn't deserve to live. That person just doesn't belong here. There's no value in this person.

Now, murder, therefore, springs from anger sometimes. And by the way, a person may kill in anger when he actually does value a person. A person may value his wife but find her in bed with another man and kill her and him.

It's happened before. There are two separate reasons people murder, but both of them are wicked. One is simply to not value a person.

The other is to be angry at them in a sinful manner. And we'll talk in a moment what sinful anger is as opposed to non-sinful anger. But the point Jesus is making is, of course, there's a greater judgment for murder than they have thought.

And there are things less scandalous than murder that fall under the same judgment. And they do so, and they are mentioned here, the particular issues that are mentioned here are mentioned because they are akin to murder. But how are they akin to murder? Well, I mean, as I say, there's one obvious way that they're akin to murder, and that is that both contempt or lack of value for a person and anger are both, at times, motives for murder.

They are attitudes that are involved in murder. And we could say we've seen it all, all that Jesus is saying here. We need to look no further if we just say that to have murderous motives is as bad as going ahead and pulling the trigger.

But that's not quite what Jesus is saying, I believe. I believe that Jesus here is talking about God's concern for justice and that God hates murder. But it's not because He hates killing.

I'm not saying God doesn't hate killing. If He hates killing, though, He hates it at a different level than He hates murder. He hates murder more because there are times when God Himself indulges in killing.

He killed the whole population of the world in Noah's day. He killed everybody in Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's day. He killed all the Canaanites or commanded the Israelites to do so.

It was essentially His doing in the days of Joshua. He killed individuals like Ananias and Sapphira or Nadab and Abihu, the priests who profaned the tabernacle. There are times when God has no objection to killing people.

There are times when people deserve to die. What God is opposed to is unjust killing. And that is when someone does not deserve to die and they are put to death.

Now, I expect someone to say, well, don't we all deserve to die? I mean, we are all sinners. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And the wages of sin is death.

So don't we all deserve to die? And of course, we all deserve to die as far as God is concerned. Our crimes against God entitle Him to execute us if He wishes because we have done things worthy of death in His sight. And He is the offended party and He has the right to execute if He chooses.

But for people to kill other people is another issue. A law was laid down in Genesis chapter 9 that he who sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. Now, it makes it very clear that killing people is wrong unless, of course, that person has done something like murder, shedding blood already himself, in which case, shedding blood is not wrong.

In fact, it's right. There are people who have... All people have done things worthy of death before God, but not all people have done things worthy of death before society so that society is entitled to put them down, to take them out. There are crimes against society that are so severe that the Bible says people who do them should be executed by society.

People should do it to them. But murder is when one person kills another person and the

victim has done nothing that justifies being condemned and killed by society, by other human beings, in other words. And there are some crimes that are worthy of death, and the Bible actually gives a large number of them in the Old Testament.

There are at least thirty different crimes mentioned in the Old Testament, which, according to Scripture, if a person does that, it is a sufficient crime against society and against God and against humanity that humans should be executed for doing it. These crimes include murder, they include adultery, sodomy, bestiality, kidnapping, and a number of other things, a large number. And they are worthy of death.

Does the New Testament teach that such crimes render a person worthy of death? Well, it seems as if it does. In Romans chapter 1, Paul makes a long list of wicked things that people do when society is totally depraved. Romans chapter 1 says these people are filled with all unrighteousness.

Verse 29, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness, they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents. By the way, that was punishable by death in the Old Testament, too, as striking your parents or cursing your parents. Undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.

And it says in verse 32, who knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do they do the same, but they also approve of those who practice them. Now, arguably, Paul says worthy of death here just means before God because some of the crimes he mentions are not really capital crimes. But some of them are.

And Paul is very clear that certain behaviors are indeed worthy of death. And when Paul appealed to Caesar, when he was before the governor, let me see if I can quickly find his statement here. Verse 11 of Acts 25.

Acts 25, verse 11. Paul is standing before Festus, the Roman governor, on defense, giving a defense for his life. He was accused of false charges by the Jews.

And he says in verse 11, if I am an offender or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying. And he means dying at the hands of the court. Of course, Paul doesn't object to dying.

To die is gain as a Christian. In the abstract or the spiritual sense, he doesn't object to dying at all. He's talking about ethics here.

If I've done something worthy of death, that is worthy of execution, then I do not object to being executed. In principle, it does not offend me. But he says, since there's nothing in these things which these men accuse me of, no one can deliver me to them, I appeal to Caesar.

But Paul indicated that he felt even under the New Testament certain deeds done were worthy of execution. He said he had done none of them, but had he done them, he would not object in principle to the sentence of execution being brought even against himself, which indicates that capital punishment is both an Old Testament and a New Testament teaching. It is not the same thing as murder.

Now, if God approves of capital punishment but does not approve of murder, it is clear that it is not simply the fact that a person dies that makes murder offensive. Because a person dies in capital punishment. A person dies when God sends fire and brimstone on them in Sodom and Gomorrah.

People die in various ways at the hand of God and at the command of God. God's objection to murder is not simply that a human being dies. All people die sooner or later.

What makes murder an offense to God is that a person dies unjustly. A person dies that God has not counted worthy of dying at that moment. That human beings have taken into their own hands the killing of somebody that God has not declared worthy of death.

This is why, of course, Christians generally object to abortion and to euthanasia. Euthanasia, you can make a very good case for mercy killing. I mean, some people are in actual agony for years and years on end and a simple, you know, painless treatment could put them out instantly and put them out of their suffering.

And it seems like a very merciful thing to do. Saul had been injured by bows and arrows of the Philistines and was dying and he asked his armor bearer to put him out of his misery to kill him. His armor bearer wouldn't do it.

So Saul fell on his own sword and then the armor bearer fell on his own two. So, you know, if I were there, I wouldn't know what to do to tell you the truth if I were that armor bearer. I mean, my king has commanded me to put him out of his misery.

He's in misery. His enemies are going to come. They're going to torture him when he comes.

I mean, I could do him a big favor. Send him out of this world. But Saul was not ready to die, for one thing.

Saul was not ready to meet God. He died unready to meet God. But far be it from me to be the one to draw his final breath from him.

I mean, there's a sense which our hearts would want to help that person out by killing them, knowing that they're going to die anyway. We could hasten that. We can end the suffering.

But it simply isn't our province. They've not done something worthy of being executed by

us. And therefore, it would be murder on our part to do it, and we would be taking God's job into our own hands, which he has not authorized us to do in such a case.

Now, in the case of abortion, it's even worse, because the person that's being aborted then, in most cases, isn't facing imminent torture and death. They're just facing imminent life and a career and a life in this world, and they're just taken out because it's an inconvenience to someone else. But there are people who wonder at conservative Christians who oppose abortion but favor capital punishment, because people who oppose abortion usually are called pro-life.

And yet most liberal people who are not pro-life are against capital punishment. They say, Well, you know, we believe human life is valuable. We don't think we should kill people who are criminals.

And you Christians who say you're pro-life, you believe in killing them. You're pro-death. Well, of course, the whole issue here has got to be understood more clearly.

It's not that one is pro-life and one is pro-death. The Christian must be pro-justice. To take an innocent child's life is an injustice.

It's murder. To take the life of somebody who's done something worthy of death is justice. It's not death or life that we idolize.

It is justice that we are concerned with, because God is concerned with justice, that we do what is right, what is deserved to a person. Now, I will say this. When it comes to executing criminals, I personally do not believe that Christians belong in that role.

And some people think that that's a cop-out, but it isn't a cop-out. I believe in principle in capital punishment, and I believe that governments have the right to exercise capital punishment. In fact, the duty to do so when people do things worthy of death.

But I don't believe that Christians are called to be in that governmental function. I believe that Christians are part of a different entity than the government, that the church and the state are two separate issues with God. He's ordained the state, and he's ordained the church, and they have separate functions, and they are ordained for separate purposes.

And just like one action can be right for one person and wrong for another. For example, if I'm speeding down this highway here at 80 miles an hour, it's wrong for me to get a ticket. If a policeman is doing it with his lights flashing, then he's doing something quite legitimate.

He's authorized to do that. That's what he's supposed to do. I'm not.

For a man to sleep with his wife is all right. For his neighbor to sleep with the man's wife

is wrong. It's the same action, but one person is authorized, the other is not authorized by God to do that.

Likewise, if executing criminals is an action that is right for one man, it doesn't mean it's right for every man. If it's right for the agent of the state, it's not right for a member of the body of Christ, because the body of Christ has a different calling and function. That is not inconsistent.

Some people think it's a cop-out for me to say, well, I believe in comprehension, but I wouldn't throw the switch myself. It's not a cop-out. It has to do with recognizing vocational callings.

Christ has called his people to do a distinctive thing. Let the dead bury the dead. Therefore, not all killing is equally offensive to God.

Now, God is grieved, even with capital punishment, but he's grieved in the sense that I would be grieved to send my child in for cancer surgery. I approve of the surgery, but I'm grieved that my child has to go through it. I mean, to me, it's a sad thing.

Jesus was even grieved at the tomb of Lazarus, although he knew he was going to raise him from the dead. He was grieved just because I think he was confronted with the agony and the grief that comes to people because of sin and because of death in the world. And he knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, but seeing all the people weeping and his friends all distraught and so forth, it moved him.

And I believe that God is very moved and very grieved when a sinner dies. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his evil away and live. But though he has no pleasure in it, as a righteous judge, he ordains it and commands it.

Now, what I'm saying is that Jesus' listeners had always heard it's wrong to murder, and most of them didn't go around killing people. Most of them didn't murder, and they thought they were doing okay. But they never really understood why God opposed murder.

If they had, there would have been other behaviors that would have been affected, too. If they realize that God's objection to murder is that it is a heinous example of an injustice committed by one person against another person. If they knew that that was the core of God's objection, then they'd realize that, hey, God doesn't like that injustice.

He doesn't like injustice. How many other things do I do that are injustice that would offend God, like murder offends God? Maybe not to the same degree because murder is more heinous than certain other things, and it hurts more people and does more permanent damage and so forth. But still, there are lesser examples of injustice that are objectionable to God for the same reason that murder is objectionable.



Now, being angry at your brother without a cause, that's an injustice. Why? Because it's without a cause. Just like murdering a man, killing a man without a cause is an injustice.

Being angry at him without a cause is an injustice. Holding him in contempt without a cause is an injustice. Now, there is such a thing as legitimate anger, and there is such a thing as legitimately calling somebody a fool.

Jesus did it. Paul did it. And I don't think there's anything innately wrong with Christians doing it in certain circumstances.

Again, Jesus makes his statements in an absolutist-sounding way that makes it sound as if there'd never be an exception. But that's the use of hyperbole there. There are exceptions.

And those exceptions are made clear elsewhere in Scripture. But he makes the statement in the way he does, as absolute-sounding as he does, in order to make it strongly. That anger, generally speaking, boast anger, is an injustice.

We get angry too quickly. We get offended without justification because we're thin-skinned, and we are usually made angry by that which inconveniences us. The person who cuts us off on the freeway probably doesn't even know they did it.

They've meant us no wrong, it may be, but we get angry at them. Why? Because there's some kind of a conflict between us and them? No, just because we're thin-skinned. Just because we're self-centered.

But without any just cause, it may be, we get angry. Somebody keeps us waiting, and we get angry. Though it may well be that they kept us waiting for some legitimate reason.

There are many things, probably in most things, we get angry, is selfishly, and not out of concern for someone else. One thing that a murderer is certainly doing is not being concerned about giving the benefit of the doubt to his victim. He's not being concerned about the rights and interests of his victim.

So, in most anger, we're not giving the benefit of the doubt to the person that is irritating us. It doesn't occur to us that there may be something they're going through. It doesn't justify their irritating behavior, perhaps, but it doesn't justify our being angry at them.

Anger is an emotion that does sometimes lead to murder, but whether it does or not, an unjust anger is wrong for the same reason that unjust killing is wrong. And contempt for a person that is not just is wrong, too. Now, to call someone a fool because they are, that's a different issue.

Call someone a fool just because you hate them, and they're not really a fool, that's an unjust criticism. That's bearing a false witness against them. That is maligning them

unrighteously, unjustly.

If it is just, it is not offensive. That's the point. What Jesus is talking about here is God's concern for justice.

If it's just to be angry, that's different than if it's not just. If there's anger with a cause, even then you shouldn't let the sun go down on your wrath because it'll fester in you. But there are things that justly make you angry.

Now, when I say justly, we need to remember that if you think I have a right to be angry because that person hurt me, I'm not sure that being angry for those reasons is ever just. For the simple reason that I know that I deserve to be wronged in many ways more than I am. I know that because I am a sinner, I do not deserve to be treated like a perfect person.

And if somebody does something, even maliciously toward me, who am I to say I don't deserve it? How can I pretend that I have lived such a life that I don't deserve to have someone wrong me? Have I never wronged anyone else? The measure you meet will be measured back to you, Jesus said elsewhere in chapter 7. Whatever you've done, it'll come back to you, maybe not from the same person. But if somebody treats me badly in such a way that might incur my anger and injures me, I have to ask myself, well, have I ever injured anybody else? If someone gossips about me, I have to ask, have I ever gossiped about anyone else? If anyone is slow in paying me a debt, have I ever been slow in paying a debt? If someone keeps me waiting, have I ever kept anyone waiting? You see, to be angry at a personal injury is almost always unjust. It's unjust to be angry because I deserve injury.

I have injured others, and I have not paid back all of those debts. I have not really lived in such a way as to say, God, I have no faults in me. Therefore, no one should treat me badly in any way.

And therefore, whenever I'm angry at something done to me, it is unjust. Even if what is done to me is an unjust thing that was done by another person. The very fact that I am an unjust person or have been, and I deserve worse than what I get, means that I have no right to be angry at somebody else who gives me something that I think I don't deserve.

But in fact, if I got exactly what I deserved, I'd probably get far worse. What I'm saying is that anger, when it is righteous, is not directed toward those who have hurt me. And that is very clear.

When I'm angry at someone who has hurt me, I'm motivated by that sinful self-interest. I don't like to be hurt. I don't like to be injured.

I don't like to be slighted. I don't like to be misrepresented or misunderstood. I don't like

that, so I get angry.

But if I do, I show myself not to be concerned about justice, but concerned about me. Justice and love, which justice is a part of, is by definition concerned about someone other than me. And if I'm angry because I'm hurt for my sake, then I'm concerned only about me.

A forgiving person, a loving person, will say, well, this person may have done wrong to me, but that person is no worse than I am. I've done wrong to others. Therefore, I cannot be angry without being a hypocrite.

I will not allow myself to be angry at that person. But then, when is anger righteous? Well, I believe that anger is righteous when you're angry on behalf of another about a situation that makes God Himself angry. Now, sometimes that other person deserves it too, deserves what they're getting.

And we need to be careful not to be angry at somebody because they hurt someone who's our friend. Again, that is not disinterested. That is not unselfish.

Someone did my friend wrong. Someone spoke evil of my friend, and that makes me angry. Well, do I get as angry when someone speaks evil of someone I don't know? When I'm over here gossiping, and the person is being disgusted, I don't even know the person.

Do I get angry at that? If I don't, but I get angry when I hear someone speaking evil of my friend, then the fact that I'm angry is only because they're my friend, and that's my selfishness coming out again. The fact is that we should have a disinterested concern about justice. And when we know of innocent people who suffer at the hands of others, this should make us angry.

Now, there are not very many innocent people. There are children. When children are abused, when children are molested, when children are kidnapped, that, I believe, is a righteous cause for anger.

There is a case of an innocent party, through no fault of their own, being wronged. When God is insulted, that's a righteous cause for anger, because God is an innocent party. Jesus seemed to be upset with His disciples when they didn't want to let the children come to Him.

It doesn't say He was angry, but He did rebuke them, and He did sound like He put them in their place. We know He got angry about some things. We don't know if He was angry on that occasion.

He appears to have been angry when He drove the money changers out of the temple. It does not say He was angry specifically, but His actions seem to indicate an emotion that looks like anger. And we know He was angry at the Pharisees in the synagogue when the

man was there with the withered hand, because the Bible actually says Jesus was angry on that occasion.

Well, Jesus' anger is always righteous. And notice that when He was angry, He was always angry on behalf of some innocent party, usually God. God's temple is being profaned.

God's work is being maligned. And if God is the one who is being insulted and victimized by the action, there is grounds for anger, and that anger is a righteous anger. But it is so seldom the anger that people have.

Some people are never angry at an irreverent joke or a sacrilegious statement or to hear God's name used in vain. They're never angry, but they're angry at the slightest little slight that is done against them. And this is human nature.

That anger, which is most common among human beings, is sinful. It is self-centered and unjust. But the only anger that is righteous is when you are angry on behalf of an innocent party who has been a victim, usually God.

God's the most innocent party of all. And Jesus' anger was almost always toward those who were offending God. It's interesting that He was not angry at those who hurt Him.

When they nailed Him to the cross, His reaction was, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. He did not exhibit any anger toward Pilate or toward the Sanhedrin or toward the Romans who nailed Him to the cross or toward Judas who betrayed Him. He said, Friend, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? There's no anger there.

Jesus had no anger toward anyone who harmed Him personally. When He got angry, He was angry on behalf of God. And that is the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger.

Same thing in the imprecatory Psalms. David appears angry at times toward people, but if you read the Psalms carefully, virtually every time he says, it's those people who hate you, God, it's those people who violate your laws, it's those people who thumb their nose at you. I get so angry at those people.

But when someone hurt him, whether it was Saul or Absalom or someone else wanted to kill him, David never expressed anger toward them, only grief when they died. Likewise, Paul didn't have any anger toward the brethren who fled when he was on trial at his hour of greatest need for friends and companions, stood on trial before Nero for his life, and they all fled. They all left him.

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul says in verse 16, At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. It's like Stephen saying when they were stoning him, do not lay this sin to their charge.

No anger there toward those who hurt me. But look a few verses earlier, verses 14 and 15, 2 Timothy 4, 14 and 15, Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works.

Why? These people who abandoned Paul at his trial, he wished them not to be charged for their sin. But why does he wish Alexander to be repaid according to his wicked works? And others judged. Why? Well, verse 15, You must also be aware of him, because he has greatly resisted our words.

Notice the gospel. This man is an enemy of the gospel. Now God will take care of him.

I hope he does. May God reward him according to his wicked works. He's opposing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So those that oppose God were the rightful objects of anger from David, from Jesus, from Paul, and from anyone really who's righteous, who shares God's sentiments. But anger toward people who hurt you, that's not found among the righteous. And yet that is the kind of anger that is most commonly found among men.

Which is why Jesus could say, as he could even just say, whoever is angry at his brother without a cause is in danger of judgment. And be right in 99% of the cases. It's an overstatement because there are exceptions.

And he's talking about anger without just cause. But you see, without just cause is the main issue. Whatever is without just cause is unjust.

Whatever is with just cause is just. And God's concern here is with justice. Now Jesus goes on and gives two more illustrations related to this.

And these two illustrations are very fine illustrations in themselves, but one could easily ask, why are they here? Why are they included in this particular part of this discussion? What do they contribute to it? And I believe the only way to make sense of the answer, to give a sensible answer, is to say that these two are examples of how God is concerned about justice in your life. He's not only concerned that you not kill people. There are other issues of injustice and justice that God wants you to observe in your life.

And he gives examples of situations which are where you've... Well, let me give them to you. Verse 23 and 24 gives one of them. And verse 25 and 26 gives the other.

Verse 23 and 24 say, Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. At one level, this teaches us, and this is what we usually teach from it, at one level, this teaches us that God does not desire our worship if we are neglecting our relationship with our brother.

And he that says, I love God, and hates his brother, is a liar. As it says in 1 John 4. And if you have something against your brother and you're not handling it, you're not taking care of it responsibly, then don't bother coming to God. He doesn't want to hear from you right now.

He wants you, instead, to go to your brother. Now, he gives the example of bringing your gift to the altar, obviously assuming the disciples, as Jews, go to the temple and they bring animals to the altar. We don't offer those kinds of sacrifices, but we offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice, according to Romans 12, verse 1. We offer up our prayers and praise to God as a spiritual sacrifice, according to Hebrews 13, 15.

Our lives and our praise is a sacrifice to God, our worship, but these are not acceptable to God if we are neglecting a relationship. Now, this is the sermon that usually comes out of these verses, and it's an easy sermon to find there, and it's a good one, and it's a needed one. Christians need to be told this because Christians are often more negligent of their relationships with other people than they are of going to church and saying their prayers and worshiping and doing all those outward forms of religion.

But those forms of religion are offensive to God if they are not coming from a person who is keeping up to date in terms of being a peacemaker with his brother and having relationships handled in a biblically responsible way is a priority and a prerequisite to worship of God. But although that is the most accessible sermon out of these two verses, there's a deeper meaning, I believe. Jesus said, if your brother has something against you, what that means is you've done something to offend him.

You've done some wrong to him. At least he perceives it as a wrong, and there's a good chance it really is a wrong. We're not above doing wrong things.

It would be nice if we were, but there are times when we let a word slip out about someone and later we think, oh man, I shouldn't have said that to that party. I shouldn't have said that. That was a secret I was charged with.

I wasn't supposed to expose that. Or I shouldn't have said that. Now that person is going to think badly of that person.

That's an injustice. I've done wrong to a person. If I don't pay on time a debt that I owe, or don't pay it at all, or if I don't keep a promise of some kind, and sometimes it's very difficult to keep every promise we make.

Sometimes we even forget what things we promise to people. We make a promise and we forget we made it and don't keep it, or we intend to keep it and something prevents it, or it makes it very difficult. We are not perfect people and we end up injuring other people by failure to do what we owe, failure to do what we should do.

We become guilty of injustice toward other people. And this is the cause of their

offendedness toward us. If you are worshiping God or desire to worship God, and remember somebody has been wronged by you and they know it, and they're offended, and they're holding something against you, then make the rectifying of that situation your priority over even worshiping God.

Now, go and make it right with your neighbor. Go and make it right. You owe him money, go and pay him.

Or at least make some kind of frank arrangement and apologize and say, I'm sorry, I haven't kept my promise. I haven't done what I should do. I intend to do it.

Unless you can release me from that obligation, I will do it to the best of my ability. It may take a long time to think, but I want you to know I intend to do the just thing. I intend to do the right thing.

Make sure you don't go around doing injustices to people, leaving them unredressed because you don't care about those things as much as you care about your religious faiths. God cares more about your concern for doing what's right and just to your neighbor than He does about your offering animals on the altar or singing His praises in church. That's what Jesus, I think, is saying.

If you have done an injustice, if you've done unjust things to your brother, He's holding it against you. You go and do the right thing. Do the just thing.

Go make it right with him. And then you can talk to God. And then there's this other part, verses 25 and 26.

Agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge. The judge hand you over to the officer and you'll be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid the last penny.

Now, many people have taken this almost entirely spiritually, both Protestant and Catholic, especially Catholic. I once heard a Catholic apologist trying to win over Protestants to Catholicism. And he was on this occasion talking about the doctrine of purgatory.

And he said, yeah, purgatory is even taught in the Bible. Look at this verse here. And he read this verse.

I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid the last penny. Now, he says, obviously that's not referring to hell because you can't get out of hell one way or any way at all. It's not heaven, obviously, if you're being thrown over into the dungeon or into prison.

The prison, he said, is not heaven, obviously, and it's not hell because it is a place you can get out of once you've paid the last penny. It is the place of purgatory. It is the place where you go to prison, spiritually, until your debt is paid.

So, because he thought Jesus was here speaking about some temporary debtor's prison of sort in the cosmic realm, in the spiritual realm, that purgatory, the doctrine of purgatory, best fits this illustration. And I've even heard, I've heard recently on the radio, Protestant ministers make similar applications, not purgatory, but they would just make it say this is hell. They would say, you know, you'll never pay the last penny.

I mean, when you're in jail, when you're in judgment, you can't earn money. So, you're going there until you pay the last penny. You can't pay, so you'll just be there forever.

But this peculiar thing about all this is I don't understand why anyone applies this to the spiritual or to the eternal realm at all. Jesus is talking about interpersonal relationships. He has just talked about you've done something wrong towards your brother.

Go and make it right with your brother. Now, he takes this brotherly conflict a step further. What if you don't make it right with your brother? He may take you to court.

Wouldn't be the first time Christians have been taken to court because they've done something wrong to someone. He says, listen, agree with your adversary while you're in the way. Agree out of court.

Settle it out of court. If you've done wrong, go to him and do right. If you don't, if you leave this unattended to, if you neglect your responsibility here, he may take you to court.

And if he does, guess what? They'll find you guilty. And you'll be turned over to the officer and thrown into prison, and you'll be there until you pay your last penny. In other words, don't think God's going to bail you.

If you have done something to your brother and you've not made it right to your brother, and you've not settled with him in a just manner, and he throws you in jail, takes you to court and you get thrown in jail, don't think that God's going to send an angel and open the prison doors for you. You're stuck, man. You made your bed.

And you sleep in it. If you behave unjustly toward other people, not only does that offend God, and He doesn't want you to worship Him, but that offends men in many cases. There are things that are punishable at court of law.

And if you do something that makes you subject by injustice to your brother to legal penalties, and you're thrown in jail, don't expect God to get you out. You're stuck there until you pay all you owe. And I don't see anything spiritual about this at all, except that justice is a spiritual issue.



And it's just a way, I think, of Jesus illustrating the need to make it your priority. It's made clear that He's talking about settling out of court. If you would look at the parallel in Luke.

In Luke 12, verses 57-59. This is a parallel to this teaching. Luke 12, 57-59.

Yes, and why even of your own selves do you not judge what is right or just? When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you should not depart from there until you've paid your very last mite. Obviously the same teaching, but notice it's much more clear that he's talking about settling out of court with a person.

Because in Matthew it simply says, agree with your adversary quickly while you're on the way with him. It doesn't say where you're on the way to. But in Luke it makes clear you're on the way to the magistrate.

He's taking you to court. Settle with him before you get there, he says. And he says that as an illustration of this general statement of verse 57.

Luke 12, 57. Yes, why don't you judge what is righteous? Why don't you judge what is just, in other words? Why don't you think and act according to justice? You will not get yourself into these legal problems if you don't cheat your brother. He won't have anything to take you to court about.

And if you have cheated him, you better go and pay him. Or he might take you to court. Jesus is just down to earth giving ordinary, day-by-day advice.

He's not teaching lofty, spiritual, heavenly truths here. He's just saying, listen, God is concerned about justice. And by the way, the courts are concerned about that too.

And if you neglect justice toward your brother, God won't listen to you. He won't listen to you. He won't receive your sacrifice.

And your brother may take you to court, and the courts won't listen to any plea, either. You'll go to jail. And God is not going to be on your side in this matter.

He's not going to come and spring you. You'll be there. You'll rot there.

If that's what the penalty for your deed is. Now, of course, there are times when God sprang people from jail, but not when they were arrested for some unjust thing, you see. Peter was thrown in jail because he was a Christian.

And God sent an angel and let him out. Paul and Silas were thrown in jail in Philippi because they were Christians. And God let him out because they were not there for any injustice they had done.

Look over at 1 Peter chapter 4. 1 Peter chapter 4, beginning with verse 14. Peter said, But if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. Now, of course what he's saying is that if you are persecuted, thrown in jail or whatever for being a Christian, well, don't worry about that.

That's nothing to be ashamed of. Glorify God that you're suffering for Jesus' sake. But if you're thrown in jail or persecuted or prosecuted for being a murderer, a thief, or an evildoer, whatever, that shouldn't happen with you as a Christian.

Those are crimes. But notice Peter does not think it's unimaginable that a Christian might commit a crime. He has to tell the Christians, don't be murderers, don't be thieves, don't be busybodies.

Christians ought to already know that. But what he's saying is, listen, you may suffer for those things and there's no glory in that. There's no honor to God in that.

If you suffer for being a Christian, that's a totally different story. But if you suffer for being a criminal, if you suffer for injustices that you have done, then you deserve what you get and there's no glory to God in your testimony there. So, what I understand Jesus to have done in this passage is to identify the core reason why murder is wrong.

Everybody acknowledged murder to be wrong. You see, what Jesus is doing, using sort of an ad hominem, sort of way of reasoning. You acknowledge this already, therefore, my point is established.

You acknowledge that murder is wrong. But if murder is wrong, I'll tell you why it is wrong and for the same reason a whole bunch of other things are wrong. And the real issue that makes one thing wrong or another in this case is the injustice of it.

To be angry unjustly. To have contempt for your brother unjustly. These things are of the same species of sin as to kill your brother unjustly.

They are not as extreme, but they are lesser expressions of the same sinful injustice. And those later two illustrations he gives in 23 through 26 there are all about interpersonal relationship. He's saying, listen, if you do wrong to your brother, if you are unjust to your brother, you will have to answer to God and to man for that.

To God, because he will not care to receive your sacrifice. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, it says in Proverbs. Don't bother offering your sacrifice to God if you've got wickedness and injustice that you're involved in with your neighbor.

You go get that right first. But it's not only God who's offended by injustice, man is too. And your brother whom you've done wrong to has other recourse besides to complain to God.

He can take you to the judge. The judge can find you guilty if you are guilty and deliver you over to the magistrate or the officer and be thrown in jail. And there are penalties that you can expect from man as well as from God if you conduct yourself unjustly toward your brother.

And that is, as I understand it, what Jesus is teaching here. Now, the next illustration has to do with adultery. And we'll talk about that in our next session.

But I might just say that adultery, maybe I'll talk about it in this session. It wouldn't hurt. We're going to run out of sessions before long if I give myself the luxury.

Let me get into the subject of adultery. We have something like almost 15 minutes. Might as well.

Look at Matthew 5, 27. It says, You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you.

For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. This obviously is a much shorter treatment than that on murder. And therefore, we might be able to do it some justice here.

There's only a few things we need to make comment on here. First of all, when we think of adultery as a sin, more likely than not, we're going to be thinking about it as a sin of impurity, as a sin of sexual impurity. And one reason for thinking of it that way is because there's a whole class of sins in the Old Testament that are sins of sexual impurity.

To have sex with an unmarried person or to have sex with a person who's married but not to you. To have sex with an animal or with a person of your same sex or with a person who's more closely related to you than is appropriate. All of these things in the Old Testament are sexual acts of impurity.

They're the wrong use of one's sexual energies and of the sexual potential. And because adultery falls into that general class of sexually impure actions, we may be inclined to think of it only in those terms. Now sexually impure actions are bad in their own right.

I mean, there are reasons why sexual impurity is wrong. There's something very, well, I don't want to get too spooky, but almost mystical about sexual misconduct that puts it in a class different than most other kinds of misconduct. Paul himself says that most sins, all sin is outside the body, but he that commits fornication sins against his own body.

And I don't think he's talking about the fact that you might get venereal disease or something. I think he's talking about the fact that there's a defilement, a spiritual defilement of the body that takes place when there is sexual misconduct that does not accrue to ordinary sins of stealing and other kinds of things like that. I mean, sin is sin, but there's a certain kind of effect that sexual sin has upon the soul and upon the conscience that is different than most other sins.

You will usually find this to be the case. Unless people are just plain promiscuous and sleep with everyone that comes along, if people begin to have an illicit sexual relationship, and they don't have, you know, a different one with someone else every day, but it's more like a serious relationship of sorts, but it becomes sexual, and it shouldn't be. There is a bonding that takes place there that is very, very difficult to get over if the relationship breaks up.

And I remember talking to a man who dealt with youth in the church quite a bit, and he said whenever a young girl comes to him crying and upset and torn up about a relationship with a boy that broke up, and he says, well, how long ago did it break up? Because she says, you know, three months ago or something like that. And he says, well, you had sex together, didn't you? And he says, he's never been wrong yet. Of course, it may just be that so many kids have sex, you're going to hit it right more often than not if you say that.

But his conclusion was that if a couple have romantic interests and break up, but they've had no sex, they get over it a lot more quickly than that. It doesn't take three months to get over it. But if they've been sexually involved, there's a bonding there that makes it hurt for a long, long, long time afterward.

Now, some people become so numb to this because of such total promiscuity that they wouldn't even know of this anymore. But there is, in fact, a bonding element to the sexual relationship that God intended there to be. The reason, one reason at least, that sex outside of marriage is always wrong is because sex is a life-joining activity.

The two become one flesh, Paul said. Quoting Genesis, but Paul quoted it even in the connection of sleeping with a prostitute. He said the two become one flesh.

He said that in 1 Corinthians 6. And because it is a life-joining activity, but if it's not in marriage, it's without a life-joining intention. You see, marriage is, a covenant is made between parties when they intend to join their lives permanently. And sex within that covenant is appropriate and safe and fulfilling.

But to have a life-joining, life-uniting activity without a life-uniting intention is sin. There's more reasons it's sin as well. And of course that's because sex is a reproductive activity.

And one of the, I think, major reasons that all forms of sex outside of marriage are an offense to God is because no other place but marriage is an appropriate place for reproduction. Where there is no marriage, there's no guarantee that a child will be raised in the proper setting with a father and a mother who are permanently committed to each other and to the child. And likewise, adultery is wrong partly because it's a reproductive activity.

And there's always the potential, of course, of a man making a woman pregnant who's not his wife and is someone else's wife, which fouls up that whole family situation. As I say, sexual activity in itself is a separate category for concern. But I don't believe that Jesus brings it up here in order to just talk about sexual purity.

I think here is another illustration of injustice. Just as a man who murders another has deprived that victim of his rights to his life, the man who commits adultery against his brother by sleeping with his wife has deprived and cheated his brother. That's why we call it cheating.

Do you ever wonder why it was called cheating on your mate? Because it's cheating. It's unjust. It's unfair.

You're depriving someone, cheating someone of their right. What is their right? Well, Paul tells us what the right is in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. 1 Corinthians 7, verses 4 and 5. It says, The wife does not have authority. Authority is intrinsically a right.

The wife does not have authority or right over her own body, but her husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have the authority or the right over his own body, but his wife does. Now do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer and then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Notice, he says, the wife has an exclusive right to her husband's body. The husband has the exclusive right to his wife's body. Even the husband has more right to his wife's body than she has to it.

And she has more right to his body than he has to it. The wife doesn't have the right over her own body. Her husband has the right over her body.

The husband doesn't have the right over his own body. His wife has the right to his body. So much so that to deny one another desired sexual intimacy is to deprive one another of a right.

And even more so, to take a woman's body or a man's body and go out and sleep with

somebody other than the spouse is certainly to deprive the spouse of rights. That's what injustice is. It's a terrible injustice.

It's a theft of a worse sort than just stealing property. And therefore adultery, like murder, although they are very different acts, they are very much the same in one respect, and that is that they are an injustice. Now Jesus talks about looking at a woman to lust after her being a sin, and it's hard to know exactly why this would be true if we're just talking about sexual, you know, adultery as a sexual act.

An act of sexual impurity, like homosexuality or bestiality, I mean, if we're just considering the objectionableness of adultery because it's sexual, then why would looking with lust be that? I mean, it's true, sometimes a lustful look will arouse sexual juices and things like that, but not always. To look at a woman to lust after her is to use a woman's body for your own pleasure and arousal, maybe not physically because you're not bold enough to go out and do that, but you do it nonetheless, even though it's not yours. That woman's body belongs to her husband.

If she's not married, it belongs to her future husband. That man's body belongs to his wife. If he's not married, it belongs to his future wife.

You, who are not married to that person, have no right to use that person's body in your imagination, mentally or physically. That belongs to the spouse, and you are cheating somebody when you do that. Now, I want to make clear, Jesus didn't say whoever looks at a woman and lusts for her commits adultery.

I believe it's important to guard against doing this, but lust is the desire, and it's like saying when you're fasting, if you desire food, you've sinned. No, you haven't sinned by desiring food. There are certain things in your body that make you desire food when you're fasting.

There are certain things in your body that make you desire sex. If you're walking down the street, minding your own business, and you see somebody whose appearance involuntarily causes you to feel sexual attraction, of course your reaction to that should be to get your mind on something else immediately. But you have not necessarily sinned by having had such an attraction aroused within you.

Jesus said if you look at a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery. That speaks of intention. That certainly would mean that the use of pornography, or the intentional looking at a woman whom you know will, by that look, cause you some kind of sexual imagination and some pleasure in that way, that is doing the wrong thing.

That is like adultery, because it is depriving that person's husband, that person's wife, of the exclusive access to their body in this way. Even if you do it mentally, remember God looks at the heart, and most men would not be pleased to know that you're looking at

their wife in that way. Most women would not at all be pleased to know that some lady is looking at her husband that way.

That lady is going to be jealous over her husband, and most husbands are jealous over their wives. If they're not, they've been corrupted. Jealousy over a husband or wife is very God-like.

God is jealous over his wife too. And therefore, when you use another person's body for lust, whether you do it physically or mentally, you are doing what that person's spouse would certainly object to, and you are violating that spouse's exclusive rights. For that purpose.

Now this business about cutting off the hand and plugging out the eye, it is of course not literal. We'll have to talk about that when we come back. We have to take a break at this time.

And we'll just recap what we've said about adultery and move along. But between now and the next class, don't plug out your eye or cut off your hand, alright? We'll talk about that next time. Any questions?