

Murder In The Heart

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into Matthew chapter 5, focusing on the interconnected verses 21 through 26 about anger, and verses 27 through 30 about lust, oaths, retaliation, and loving enemies. The speaker emphasizes the seriousness of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, highlighting the need for righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom. The sermon underscores the importance of addressing issues like anger, insults, and reconciliation with others, warning of the consequences of harboring bitterness and unresolved conflicts.

Scripture: Matthew 5:21, Matthew 5:23, Matthew 5:25, Matthew 5:27, Matthew 5:43, 1 Corinthians 11:28, Galatians 5:13, John 14:15, 1 John 2:1, Galatians 5:16

Topics: "Righteousness", "Reconciliation"

Description

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Transcript

Matthew chapter 5. Now brethren, I want to say, you know I'm moving through this book systematically. We're to verses that at least in my ESV Bible has anger as a heading. Verses 21 through 26 are very much tied together.

And you know, if your Bible's like mine, you'll see 27 through 30. You have lust. You have oaths, retaliation, loving your enemies.

It's interesting now how our Lord develops, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom. And this is how he does it. Now listen, what I want you to do is make sure you listen to scripture.

It can be so easy to want to crucify the preacher when he's trying to be faithful to the text. I can tell you, I would not have preached the Sermon on the Mount. But that's a defect with me, because obviously the Lord did.

And what I mean is this, not that I wouldn't have spoken about the things that he spoke about, but I don't think I would have spoken about them the way he speaks about them. And so, look at the text with me, 5 verse 21. You have heard that it was said to those of old.

Now we might stop right there. You know, he doesn't exactly define that for us. And different people think different things.

Well, is he speaking specifically about what Moses said? Is he speaking specifically about the ways that the scribes and the Pharisees have twisted scripture? But the reality is, he pretty much says what Moses said. And I think the issue in all of this is not to get so hung up on exactly who he's speaking about. Does the things that he quotes, that they have been told of old or heard of old or was said of old, does it resonate with Moses? It does.

You can't get around that. They resonate with Moses. Now is there, over time did the scribes and the Pharisees tend to put wrong, they basically externalize the law? Yes.

And so obviously he's going after that. But he does it often times by quoting Moses, and we can't really get away from that. You shall not murder.

Which commandment? Six. And whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment, or your Bible may say liable to the judgment. But I say to you, that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment, or liable to judgment.

Whoever says to his brother, raka, or your Bible may say insults his brother. Raka is a derogatory term. It's an abuse.

It's a put down. It's like saying to somebody you lack intelligence, but it's crude. It's like you empty head.

And so, this person who does this shall be in danger of the council, but some say and, and probably feels smoother there. And whoever says you fool shall be in danger of hell fire, or liable to the hell of fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, or if you're offering your gift at the altar, and then remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar.

Go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift. And he kind of shifts a little bit again.

He shifted a little bit in 23, and he shifts again in 25. Agree with your adversary. Up until now, he's been talking about your brother.

Your Bible may say come to terms quickly with your accuser. Accuser is a good way. Adversary may not give you exactly the, it can mean that, but come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're out, or while you're on the way with him.

Lest your adversary or accuser 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 till you have paid the last penny. Now, here's the thing.

Jesus is starting his ministry with this sermon when you read Matthew's account. This seems, this is one of the longest sermons in our Bibles. This is important stuff.

This is not some off-handed teaching somewhere. And I hope you realize, I hope everybody realizes right off, that when Jesus says whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment, just exactly what he means there. He's speaking of hell.

And you can see how he's developing this. When Jesus says that when you insult another, you're in danger of a counsel, again, now I'm going to develop this a little bit more, but what he's really saying here is he's using kind of metaphoric language. He's drawing from the physical, but he's pointing over here and saying, you'll be in trouble of the real counsel.

You'll be in trouble of the true judgment. You'll be in trouble of hellfire. That's what we see.

I mean, Jesus isn't saying that if you insult someone, that the human courts and the human counsels are going to come after you. Why? That doesn't happen. That's never happened.

When has anybody got arrested for anger? Or when has anybody ever been charged with murder in a human court for anger? That doesn't happen. That clearly is not what Jesus means. If that's what he was saying, it certainly never has happened.

That's not what he wants you to get the feel. We see his terminology evolve right to the end of verse 22, and you see it. You'll be in danger of hellfire.

Liable to the hell of fire. And then look at how verse 25, agree with your adversary quickly, or your accuser. Come quickly to terms with your accuser while you're on the way, lest your accuser deliver you to the judge, and 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. Do you know where else that's referenced? That kind of wording? Over in Matthew 18, where it says that the kingdom of heaven is basically like this. And you remember, you had the one servant, and the Lord forgave him a huge debt.

Because he said, I can't pay. He said, I'll pay you. And he had compassion on him.

And then you remember what happens, his fellow servant, he doesn't have compassion on him. He has him committed to prison. And then the other servants went and told the master, and the master said, and he goes on to say, if you don't forgive, your father basically is going to put you in this prison, and you're not going to get out until you pay the last penny.

Do you realize again what this symbolically is pointing to? And we're talking about a prison that you've got to pay to get out of, for the crimes that you've committed, for the sins that you've committed. I hope you recognize what exactly is happening. Do you recognize the flavor of this? If you are angry with your brother, you're in danger of hell.

If you insult others, you are in danger of hell. If you don't make right with other people, you're in danger of hell. Over and over, doesn't it feel like, even in the next section, where he deals with lust, what does he say? He said, you pluck out, you gouge out that eye, because that's better than what? Having both your eyes and being thrown into hell.

It's kind of like, don't you get this feeling, I mean look, this is why I say, don't crucify the preacher. Because the truth is, wouldn't we all say we would like it to come this way? Kind of like, you know, you've heard that

you're not supposed to kill, but please strive to go deeper than that. Don't be angry, don't hate, strive to be reconciled with each other.

If you feel ugly thoughts towards each other, confess them to the Lord, take them, I've died for you, my blood washes your sins away when you err, when you wrongly treat each other. But he doesn't talk that way. He basically comes in here and he says, if there's lust, you're hell bound.

You could want to read behind the lines, read between the lines, and say, well clearly he's saying that true Christians, they're going to have victory over lust. True Christians are going to have victory over anger. And you know what, you'd be absolutely right in thinking that.

But isn't it interesting that he doesn't say that. He just kind of steps in and he says, listen, if you're angry, you're in danger of this. If you insult, you call people empty headed, you say fool to people, you are in danger of this.

If you don't settle matters with your accuser, you're in great danger of this. If you don't pluck out that eye of lust, you're in danger of this. And you just get this over and over and you're thinking, Lord, we want you to relent.

That's how we feel. You start reading this and it feels legal if you view it wrong. I think if we're all honest, if we just stop right here, I mean I would ask you, how do you feel when you hear that? Do you feel like that? I mean you might like to have it said different or it's like, brother, you're just carnal.

We like it just the way it is. It's the Lord. We know everything he says is right and it's good.

Certainly it is. I'm not wanting to find fault with it. I just recognize that this is severe.

It really is. And you get the feel of it, just the severity. Now look, last thing we want to be is like the scribes and the Pharisees.

They were very external. They were very legal. It was like right down the line, check, check, check.

We tied the anise. We tied the mint. We tied the cumin.

It was all this very external, very rigorous, very close. You recognize that you don't want to say, well, you know, like they said, well, we're not supposed to murder and basically we didn't murder today, so we're good with God. Oh, there's another commandment, don't call anybody fool.

Okay, so check that off, didn't call anybody fool today. You recognize that these things are not to be taken in the most just mechanical fashion. Do you know that Jesus called people fools? Do you know that right here in this sermon, it says, there's a foolish man.

Do you remember who he was? He built his house on the sand. Anybody remember where Jesus called people fool? Fools and blind. Who did he say that to like more than once? The scribes and the Pharisees.

Or, anybody see where Jesus got angry? Was Jesus ever angry with anybody? I'll tell you a good example. The Pharisees were looking for him, just waiting for him to heal on the Sabbath so that they could find fault with him. You remember the man with the withered hand? And he was angry.

Why? Because all they were concerned about is their little checklist. They didn't care at all about this guy with the withered hand. Think about how that was a difficulty.

It was a torment in his life. There's obvious exceptions. But brethren, what we need to recognize is this.

I hope you understand this. If you simply say, turn the other cheek, and you take that rigidly like the scribe and Pharisee, then where do you end up? I'll tell you where you end up. You end up like the Amish.

Do you have any Amish here? Do you know who the Amish are? Do you know that the Amish will let you walk into their house and steal their stuff, and they will not resist you? Did you know that? I remember coming across something that the Amish were actually asked. There's different accounts, actually. There's different accounts of like the Englishers.

That's what they call the Americans, the Amish do, because they're German-speaking. And I've heard stories of Americans walking into their house and stealing their stuff. And I understand that they're turning the other cheek.

They would let their women be assaulted, and they would not strike back. They would not defend. See what happens when you take this? I'll tell you this.

If you make these commandments out to be ridiculous, you can be certain you're off base. It's just like you're supposed to give to him who asks. If you make that into something ridiculous, you've missed this.

And one of the things we've got to do with this is we've got to take the spirit of the law. That doesn't mean we dismiss the letter. The letter's important.

But it's the spirit of the law that is far more important than simply that you get the mechanical rigidity of the letter. We don't want to live there. That's to live like the legalist.

The mechanical way is to say, well, we're not supposed to call anybody fool, and so I can never do that, no matter what. Or you get to the oath thing, and it's like, well, I can't make a wedding vow, I can't give an oath when I'm in a court, and there are people, you know, the same Amish people do that, maybe the Mennonites do that, but can't give an oath in a court of law. They can't do these things.

So if we end up somewhere ridiculous with these things, all we've done is we've taken the letter, and we've just squeezed the thing, and we've missed the spirit of what's being said here. I mean, we don't want to get to the place where even when righteousness might possibly demand that I call somebody a fool, or righteousness demands that I be angry, we don't want to get to the place where we feel like we can't even go there because we so misconstrued these. And you recognize the scribes and the Pharisees, everything to them was always negative.

Well, I didn't kill, I didn't call anybody fool, and so you keep the letter, and we're good. But you'd recognize that the law of God is not meant to simply put us in this place where we're just not doing the wrong thing all the time. Brethren, I hope you have eyes to see that the New Testament is about doing.

It's about good works. It's about what He has fashioned us into. You don't want to get to where the Pharisees were.

They basically, well, we didn't do this, we didn't do this, we didn't do this, and so we're good. But this isn't all just negative and negatory. You remember what this flows out of.

See, I told you in the beginning, if we forget the Beatitudes, we're going to go all wrong on this. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. You see what's driving, not just this letter of the law, we're hungering for the fullness of this thing.

The Beatitudes make clear, God is really concerned about the fact that we be lovers of righteousness. Not just mechanical, the letter of the law kind of people. We have this checklist, not just merely negatively avoiding that which is evil.

Have you ever noticed throughout the New Testament, here's the thing. I'm not inspired, but I know some guys that are. And you know what? The men who wrote the epistles and enlarged on what Jesus taught and who he was, they tell us pretty plainly that Christianity is never meant to be this, just this oppressive, strict, rigorous adherence to a bunch of oppressive rules and laws and regulations.

Have you ever noticed that? How does it speak? This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. See, those who interpreted Christ in his teaching, they said, oh no, this is a person that hungers and thirsts after righteousness.

This is a person that when they see this, it's not like, oh, you know, there's another rule to add to the list. Better not call anybody fool. And so no matter what, can't do that.

No. We're hungering and thirsting for righteousness. So the lens we put things through is, when is anger righteous? When is calling somebody fool righteous? You see what he's getting at is, these people, these scribes and Pharisees were just derogatory towards people.

They put people down. Galatians 5.13, listen to this. You probably know this.

For you brethren have been called to liberty. Does that sound oppressive? Is this just a state of obedience to oppressive rules? Paul says, brethren, you've been called to liberty. Just don't use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but use it as an opportunity to love, to serve one another.

For all the law is fulfilled. And here's the commandment. All of it's fulfilled in that word.

Even in this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Or our Lord said this, if you love me, keep my commandments. Or he said, you're also my friends if you do whatever I command you.

You see, this is not meant to be oppressive, but it's, you know what it's meant to do? It's meant, if we have eyes to see, if we link all this back to the Beatitudes, the reality is that what this is meant to be is just promote our liberty, our free development of our spiritual character. That's what he's aiming at in this. We know that if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father.

That's how the guys who interpreted all this put it down for us. That yes, we should strive to love, and if we hate our brother, when we know the love of God is not in us. But even in that letter, John's saying, look, if you do fall, we have an advocate with the Father.

That's what these guys said. And so, the glorious opportunity offered us in the Gospel, it's not like, well, we had the Ten Commandments before, and we rigorously had to do these, and now Jesus comes along in the Sermon on the Mount, and He's adding, don't call anybody fool, and you better do this all the time, and you better do that all the time. That is to absolutely miss this.

It is a heart matter. And really what he's saying is if that heart matter is missing, there's hell. Because that's what true Christianity looks like.

And I want you to see in just a second, I want to think more about the council, and this judgment, and the hell of fire, and being thrown in prison, it's like, wow, I mean in one little section that deals with anger, He hits us, like with hell, in different metaphorical language four times. You see, He's wanting to drive home a point, which falls out of, if your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not inherit the kingdom. This has to do with heaven and hell.

This is really serious stuff. And so what we need to ask ourselves is not, are there more rules I need to put on my list? But am I engaged? I mean, do I find this a delightful thing? Am I striving? I mean, is anger something that's hateful to me and calling people fools? I mean, you know one of the things that happens when you become saved is you find yourself calling yourself a fool a lot more. Do you ever notice that? Am I the only one? But brethren, this is the kind of thing that we're confronted with here.

Just a glorious opportunity offered us in the gospel. So our Lord has broken down our own selfish ways and has saved us to be free to do good. You get this, stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.

We are free men. Do you recognize that? We are free to not be angry. See the world is not free that way.

They're in bondage to their things. That's why when he gets to the lust, the world is not capable of this. The world is not capable of gouging out the eye.

They can't do this. They're in bondage. We've been freed to escape lust.

You know what you can say to the flesh? You know what you can say to sin? You don't have anything on me. You don't own me. I'm not yours anymore.

You can say that to the devil. I'm not your servant anymore. I've got a new master and I'd rather like his service.

Take my yoke upon you and learn. See it's a yoke. There's no question it's a yoke.

But did Jesus say it's oppressive? He said you'll have rest. Don't you want that? The restful yoke. Not the oppressive yoke.

See we have to see this all in the proper light. This is one of the reasons why you have to compare Scripture with Scripture. You have to think about the big picture all the time.

Now, brethren, this right here, you think about it. With the Pharisee, it's all rigid motion. He says, therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar.

You know what, that's what the Pharisee was all about. Their tithe, the anise, and the mint, and the cumin, and it's all about doing all the outward exercises of religion just right. That's what they did when they boiled that.

This was the bare minimum. I mean, it's something they could easily perform and keep. It was all boiled down to the negative.

Well, I didn't miss offering my sacrifice at the altar. I must not fail to offer the prescribed gift. But you see, what Jesus is saying is when that's all our thinking is, it's all damnable.

Jesus says, you can't think that God is at all interested in your gifts and your offerings when there's problems, and there's heart issues, and there's conflict, and there's this disunity. You can't think that. God isn't interested in it.

That's, brethren, that's precisely why when you get over to 1 Corinthians, the Lord's Supper isn't the Lord's Supper when there's division among people, because that's the issue. It's like you're despising the Church of God. And when you despise the Church of God, it turns the Lord's Supper into not the Lord's Supper.

Because see, the Lord isn't really interested, most of all, that we have that stuff right there. He's interested in looking at the hearts of the people and where that's at. And true Christianity produces something.

It produces something that's more than just external and more than just negative. So back to the text. Let's follow the text for a second.

So you've heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder. Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment, or liable to the judgment. Now, what is that, the judgment? I searched that.

Like, where does that part... We know where thou shalt not murder is in the Six Commandments, in Exodus chapter 20. We recognize that repeated again in Deuteronomy chapter 5. You can find it in various other places throughout your Bibles. But where does it talk about the judgment? Well, you know what it actually does? The judgment was basically... It was those that were in the leadership, whether it was made up of the priests or whatever, that basically made the determination if somebody was going to be put to death.

You remember the cities of refuge? Somebody escaped there? Well, there was a judgment that took place. And so if somebody came and saying, well, I didn't kill him on purpose. But, you know, the evidence and the accuser, and he said, no, he did do that.

Well, it was brought before this judgment. See, there was that danger there. But when Jesus comes back with this, but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment.

He's not saying, you know, you're going to go over to the city of refuge. That's the thing, if you're angry. Why? Because the city of refuge never dealt with anger.

The Sanhedrin never dealt with anger. Our courts don't deal with anger. And they certainly don't equate it to murder.

And it certainly isn't a capital offense, right? I mean, Jesus is not talking about earthly courts here. Because it's just... There's no validity to it. It doesn't stand.

Clearly, I hope that you will see no human court prosecutes anger. He's talking about there is a court, and there is a council, and there is a governing authority out there that will exact capital offense for this. This is not a small thing.

See, describing Pharisee, didn't kill this week. No, but were you letting bitterness in? Were you harboring ill thoughts? See, while we keep reading, he's speaking clearly about anger here. You've heard that said

of old, and he says, I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger.

Now, I know some of your Bibles, they do not say without a cause. There is a textual issue right there. But listen, bottom line, when is anger right? When is it appropriate? I mean, you know, if you've got eyes to see in Scripture.

You think Jesus was a little bit angry when he made a whip and drove the people out of the temple? Nah, not at all. He did that with a smile on his face. There were things that got him riled up.

The zeal. You see, zeal for God. When that eats you up, and it creates anger.

When anger comes from righteous motive. But you know the vast majority of human anger is from what? Sin, selfish, self-centered. And obviously that's what he's talking about.

The anger condemned is that which comes from pride. Because you know what anger usually is. I want my way, and that person is not doing it my way.

That person is frustrating me. There's something that they have I want and I can't get. I mean, it's a frustrating of self.

Nursing thoughts against people. What this says is as foul as murder. And we may think, well, you know, we didn't do it on the outside.

We didn't even let it come out of our... It does come out of their lips. They call each other, you know, empty head or fool. But we can think, see, we got to go deeper than that.

You can often hear in how people speak to one another. We can shake someone else's confidence. I mean, brethren, when he gets to the point... Again, you don't want to go through this like a scribe in Pharisee.

And say, oh, well, I can never call anybody empty head. Or I can never call anybody fool. Listen, brethren, if we have eyes to see.

This means you don't whisper to people about others. And tear down their character. This means you don't attack people.

This means you don't say bitter, awful things about other people. Because Jesus says, look, if that characterizes your life. You can say whatever you... You know, the religious people of the day were the scribes and Pharisees.

You can be extremely religious. I think I might have mentioned this in the past. But, I mean, a very well-known preacher in the U.S. His wife got saved at one of our conferences.

And she said, what convicted her. Was the fact that she had bitterness in her heart towards her mother-in-law. And, you know, listen, that kind of seed bed breeds damnation.

And that's what Jesus is saying. And He couldn't say it in any stronger words. I mean, it's just, it hits us in the face where He's dead serious.

Brethren, don't close your eyes or ears or anything else to this. I mean, murder is not simply trying to destroy the body and soul of a man. It's trying to belittle.

It's trying to tear down. It's trying to destroy the person in any shape or form. And the problem is not with other people.

Jesus is not saying the other person won't escape. You know, the person that you're angry at won't escape hell. That's not it.

So when harboring the bitterness in the heart. And certainly this speaks to all of us. Speaks to us today.

It searches the depths of every one of us. We're here confronted not only with actual murder, but we're confronted with what's in our heart. How we think about people.

This is why Paul said, that's not the Lord's Supper. Don't bring your offering to the altar like that and think that that's an acceptable sacrifice. The heart condition is the issue.

You may not have killed anybody. You may not have called anybody empty head today. But if you're walking around just, you know, you wish something bad would happen to this.

And you enjoy when something bad happens to certain people. And then you get this. This transition into verse 23.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar. If you're offering your gift at the altar. Then remember that your brother has something against you.

Leave your gift there before the altar. Go your way. First be reconciled to your brother.

Then come and offer your gift. And you know what? This is not what we expect. Why? Because he's just been talking about what we do.

What we say. Whether we have anger. Jesus was just emphasizing to me about my anger.

And then suddenly he just, you get a twist. It's me having a problem. Me speaking harsh unloving things.

How does the whole thing now get flipped on its head? Do you see what I mean? I mean Jesus presents us with a scenario in which I might not have actually have any anger at all. It's kind of not. We might think he developed this in a way where I have anger.

And he's kind of developing a story or a parable or something. But no, all of a sudden he shifts. Now it's not even me that may have the anger.

It's if I know that somebody else may have this. You see the danger is that we don't want to stop with the negative. He doesn't let us stop at the negative.

All right, we say I've not actually committed murder. Yeah, but we need to go further. I've got to guard my heart from anger.

Absolutely goes further. You don't want to let the ugliness out. I don't want to say unkind things.

But then we can all be too quick to stop right there. Jesus doesn't let us stop right there. He calls us to go further in.

He wants us to live in that realm in which we fight to keep anything from standing between our brother and ourselves. We don't want to repress the unkind thoughts, repress the unkind words. We've got to switch our minds to be positive and beautiful.

I mean, that's the thing. It's relationships that are key. And you can see that here.

We've actually got to take steps to remove all the causes of trouble between us. Got to live in that realm. That's where he wants us living.

And with all the warnings of hell, what he's saying is this. If you don't live in that realm, you know what? Unless God does a radical thing. Unless there's really repentance.

If you chart that person's course, no matter how religious it is, it ends up in a prison where you can't get out until you've paid your way out. And that's not a place that you want to go and think, oh, well, at least you could pay your way out if you get there. Yeah, that might be great if you had something in your pocket to be able to pay the way out with.

This, this, I mean, wow. Brethren, let me point something out. I have seen this.

The more that we function together, the closer we are, the more we labor together, the more we do projects together, the more we evangelize together, the more we get creative about doing righteous deeds together, being fruitful together, the more we encourage each other to run fast, pray hard, to be on our knees, the more we strategize about how to get the gospel to far away four corners of the earth, the more we talk about Poland or any other place, the more we pray hard for Lebanon and pray for Thailand and Myanmar and China, the more we do that, the more we will be tested at this point. Because I'll tell you this, if we just simply have our five points and we want to sit in here and we want to talk about limited atonement all the time, the devil will leave us alone. And I'm not saying in churches like that there's not factions and fighting, but I'll tell you this, you start getting a church that starts to get notice of Satan and his minions and what you'll have is you'll have false brethren come in here, you'll have false teachers come in here, you'll have suddenly things, rifts come up, you'll have the devil whispering in your ear.

Did you see that? Pastor came in today and he said hello to everybody and he didn't say hello to me. He must have it out for me. You see, you let this little thing begin to... You know that kind of thing happens.

People say, did you see that? They snubbed me. They walked right by me. You don't know that they're thinking in their mind.

I mean, you don't even realize, but all of a sudden we start making assumptions. And then you know if a second thing happens, there it is. I knew they had some issue and you begin to get this stuff and it begins to brew in the heart and you let bitterness take and suddenly you're imagining things and it's not even true.

Brethren, I'll tell you this. This is something we have to be aggressive. We have to be active.

The more we function as a church ought to function, the closer we get to each other, the more we seek to love, the more we seek to be light, the more we seek to be salt, the more opportunity... You know the closer you get, the more you rub shoulders, the more opportunity to offend. If we just keep far away and we don't see each other except on Sunday mornings, but you know what? We start seeing each other all the time. You start to pick up on each other's defects.

And I mean, if it was just us in that un-mortified flesh that we carry around, but we actually have an enemy who loves to sow tears and bad seed and bad thoughts and create division. You know, the more this church strives to glorify God before this watching world, I guarantee. And we've... I saw it.

I've seen it in the past. The devil, there are certain things that churches start to... I think where it starts is prayer. The devil takes notice when churches start to really pray.

And that concerns him. And he will begin his deviousness in a way you haven't seen before. We're not to be passive.

Never to be passive. We've got to fight. We've got to fight.

We've got to run hard. Fight the good fight of faith. If you simply say to me, well, I can't resolve these things.

I can't go to him. I can't leave that thing there. I can't make this right.

I can't... Why? No, because I don't want to offend. I'm too uncomfortable. I'm too this.

I'm too that. I'm too afraid. I'm too intimidated.

I'm too bashful. My personality. I'll tell you again, our Lord responds with really strong words.

Do you know that when our Lord describes those who have their part in the lake of fire, the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. Do you know the first kind of person that gets thrown in there? Cowards. Brethren, I know.

Conflict, it creates... It can be uncomfortable. I recognize that. But brethren, we've got to fight.

Jesus is clearly saying, those who nurse ugly thoughts towards others, don't resolve those things. There's an end here that is not at all desirable. Brethren, remember this.

Let this sink in. Reconciliation before sacrifice. You're not absolved to feel okay about yourself if it's all just external and it's... I didn't call anybody fool today.

You don't want to think that way. You nurse ugly thoughts, there's a prison ahead and it's not a nice one. But listen, we should be thinking all the time.

The Lord's Supper is when it says to examine ourselves. And since we take the Lord's Supper every single Sunday, except when we're going to have the wedding, there's rare occasions. But you know what? It says to examine yourself in 1 Corinthians 11.

It's a perfect time to do just a spiritual inventory. Do I have any problems? You say, you get that thing, well, there kind of is a problem over here, but I'm going to go talk to somebody else about it instead of that person. Or I'm going to just... I'm going to justify myself.

Well, there isn't really bitterness when there is, but you're being cowardly. Brethren, I'll tell you, the Christian life is not for the coward, because obviously we see where the coward ends up. We've got to fight.

It says, agree, come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're on the way. What way? Well, just the way of life. Now, listen, even here, can there be false accusations? Absolutely, there can be.

But you know what? Have you ever noticed that it's very rare even with the devil that the accusations lack some truth? Have you ever noticed that? I mean, I'll tell you here, he says assuredly, well, he says, lest your accuser deliver you to the judge, judge hand you over to the officer and you'd be thrown into prison, assuredly I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you've paid the last penny. Did you get the word thrown? Even there, I feel like Jesus is not tender in his speech here. You don't get put into this prison.

You get thrown there. Say, well, that's graphic. Again, I appeal to this.

Don't crucify the preacher. This is hard language and I recognize it. But you know what? Jesus is dead serious.

If your life does not transform at this level, the end is not pretty. The end is ugly. The end is where you don't want to go.

And I'll tell you, brethren, what this ought to make us do is not grit our teeth and simply just scream, I'm going to try harder. It'll keep us on our knees. It'll keep us before the Lord.

It'll keep us pleading with him. Give us the grace. Give us grace, Lord.

Give us grace. Help us in this. I mean, brethren, Jesus didn't come into this world because we're all loving and good and kind to each other.

What did he come into this world for? He came and poured out his blood to fix us. And basically what he's saying here is that if you bear the marks of being fixed, then you're good. If you don't bear those marks, then you better run to him to get fixed.

Because in the end, there's a prison. And if you can't pay to get out, you're going to be in there a long time. Father, I pray, please help us.

Help us to grow. Help us to be this, do this. Lord, help us to live in the power and the grace of the living God.

I pray this in the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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