

The Sermon on the Mount

Part III: Focus on the Heart

“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 that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”
(Matthew 5:21-22)

Introduction

1. We have seen that disciples are called to be salt and light in the world — a visible, distinct people, having a righteousness that comes from God and not men (Matt. 5:13-20).
2. This lesson turns our attention inward: Jesus teaches us to address sin deeper than our actions; He teaches to address it from the heart, from which every action flows.

Discussion

I. The Heart Behind Murder (Matt. 5:21-26)

- A. Verse 21: human tradition focused on the external act — “You shall not murder.”
- B. Verse 22: Jesus focuses on the heart (see also Matt. 12:35; 15:18) — where does murder actually begin?
 1. It begins with anger that is allowed to fester.
 2. Words and actions are merely the progression of a sinful attitude we have allowed to poison the heart (Eph. 4:26-27).
- C. Verses 23-26: how do we prevent anger and bitterness from festering?
 1. Set your sacrifice down and make it right, as a matter of urgency.
 2. If we want our offerings and worship to be acceptable to God, we must strive to cleanse our heart of evil toward God’s people (1 John 4:20).
 3. This is a practical illustration of a spiritual reality: we have an adversary who accuses us before God (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:10).
 4. How do we address our wrongs in preparation for standing in God’s presence?
 5. We confess, appealing to our Advocate (1 John 1:9-2:2), who also and always lives to make intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

II. The Heart Behind Adultery (Matt. 5:27-30)

- A. The fruit that is born must first germinate from its seed — adultery in the act begins as lust in the heart.
- B. Verse 29: “pluck out” and “cut off” are not literal mutilation, but the mutilation of the seed that threatens to grow into the sin.
- C. Is there anything so important to us that is worth keeping to the detriment of our soul?
 1. Cut it off.

2. Pluck it out.
3. Matthew 19:21-22: This is the principal Jesus use when instructing the rich young ruler.
4. Hebrews 12:1-2: This is what it means to “lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares.”

D. Remove the “cause of stumbling” before it ever bears fruit.

III. The Heart Behind Our Word (Matt. 5:33-37)

- A. Seeking confirmation greater than a simple “yes” or “no” is symptomatic of dishonesty — the need to “swear” by anything implies a heart already inclined to deceive.
- B. The conviction of the heart should not be, “I don’t need to keep my word if I didn’t swear it.”
- C. Rather: “My ‘yes’ or my ‘no’ is as binding on my heart as a solemn oath.”

Conclusion

1. In each case — anger, lust, and dishonesty — Jesus traces the sin back, past the act to the heart that conceived it.
2. Guarding our outward conduct is not enough; if the heart is left unattended, the fruit will eventually show itself.
3. Let us examine not only what we do, but what we are becoming on the inside — for that is where obedience to Christ truly begins.