

"MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS"

Matthew 5:21-26

Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho is pastor of the largest church in the world (Seoul, South Korea). Several years ago as his ministry was becoming international, he told God, *"I will go anywhere to preach the gospel—except Japan."* He hated the Japanese because of what they had done to the Korean people and members of his own family during WWII.

Through a combination of a prolonged inner struggle, several direct challenges from others, and finally an urgent and starkly worded invitation, Cho felt called by God to preach in Japan. He went, but he went with bitterness and anger in his heart.

The first speaking engagement was to a pastor's conference. There were 1000 Japanese pastors there. Cho stood up to speak, and the only words that could utter were these, *"I hate you. I hate you. I hate you."* Then, he broke down and wept.

Anger can be a destructive emotion. A lady by the name of Becky contacted Dr. Dobson's weekend magazine and shared how her husband was filled with anger just like his own father. Now her sons were exhibiting the same tendencies. She desperately wanted the cycle to be broken. This is just one example of how families can be decimated by anger. We must learn how to defuse our anger or it will poison our own hearts along with our relationships.

Jesus met the issue head on when He preached the Sermon on the Mount. Already He had insisted that to go to heaven a person's righteousness must surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Now, with the precision of a scalpel in the hands of a skilled surgeon, Jesus began to strip away the self-righteousness that had become the hallmark of the Jewish religious leaders.

He focused on 6 life issues that were clearly dealt with in the Old Testament. The first of these was anger.

Matthew 5:21–26 is clearly one unit. It is the first of six units that begin with this recurring phrase...

"You have heard that it was said, but I say to you . . . "

These six units are Jesus' explanation of the Christian's righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (verse 20). I want you to remember that Jesus taught us a new way to live. That new lifestyle is not based on external conformity to some kind of religious dogma. No, it is based on internal conformity to our Lord's own character as exhibited in the beatitudes.

So, let's open our Bible and find out what the Lord Jesus had to say about defusing our anger and maintaining healthy relationships.

1. GUAGE THE PROBLEM CORRECTLY

Matthew 5:21–22... "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' **22** "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

Look at the phrase, ***"You have heard that the ancients were told."*** The Lord was referring to the scribes and rabbis who focused on external righteousness as opposed to internal righteousness. Jesus went on to quote the commandment (Exodus 20:13) and add their penalty.

Go back with me to ***Genesis 9:6—"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man."*** Here we see the penalty for murder and the reason for that penalty. Murder is a smear campaign on the image of God!

I want you to see how Jesus clarified the meaning through this powerful revelation....

Matthew 5:22... "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

Notice how Jesus began—**"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother."** He was not contrasting His teaching with the Old Testament. On the contrary, He was carving away the rabbinic traditions. God's truth is what mattered to Jesus and He laid it out for them plainly.

Can you imagine the shock on their face when they discovered that a person is guilty before the living God even if they are angry with someone?

"Angry" refers to brooding, simmering anger that produces a bitterness that refuses to forgive, that cherishes resentment like a trophy bass hanging on the wall.

Look at the punishment—**"shall be guilty before the court."** Listen, attitudes precede actions. When you let anger fester in your heart, you have already committed murder in your heart, and you are dishonoring the image of God!

"And whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court."

"Raca" was a slanderous and malicious attack on another person. It was like calling someone a brainless idiot, an empty head, or a good-for-nothing.

Behind this slander is a heart filled with arrogance and hatred. To attack a person created in the image of God is to attack God Himself!

Look at the punishment—**"shall be guilty before the supreme court."**
This referred to the Sanhedrin who tried the most serious of cases and leveled the harshest punishments such as stoning.

"And whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

"Fool"—To call someone this in anger and hatred was to insinuate that they were stupid and godless. We get our word, MORON from this Greek word.

Look at the punishment—**"Shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."**

"Gehenna" is a word that referred to valley outside of Jerusalem that had become the garbage dump. The fire never went out and the stench filled the air with its rancid odor. This term became reference for eternal hell.

Take a look in your own heart. What do you see? Are you angry, bitter, and resentful? Do you hate anyone? Have you written them off? Who are you to use slang, ugly, and hateful terms when you refer to certain people? John, who heard the Sermon on the Mount, would later write...

"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." (1 Jn. 3:15)

Jesus smashed the self-righteousness of the religious people of His day. Can you feel the weight of His words

2. HANDLE THE PROBLEM DECISIVELY

Matthew 5:23–24... "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

Get the picture here. Jesus is describing a Jew coming to present His sacrificial offering to the Lord God. They would lay their hands on the animal symbolizing the animal taking his sin and then dying for it. Jesus said, "Stop everything. If you come to that point and realize that there is unresolved conflict between you and someone else, go right then and do everything you can to bring about a healthy, biblical reconciliation."

Radical reconciliation must precede true worship. Internal sin—hate, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness—will put a wall between you and God. (**Matthew 15:16-20**). Look at the phrase...

"And there remember that your brother has something against you."

The anger could be in the other person's heart and not in your heart. The Lord commands you to do everything you can to reconcile with them! No, you can't control their attitudes or their actions. But you can humble yourself (remember the beatitudes) and try to close the breach! That is radical reconciliation.

Matthew 5:25–26... "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. **26** "Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent."

How long do you have to initiate this radical reconciliation? We are prone to procrastinate, aren't we? These next two verses put us on the stop

watch—*God's stop watch*. Roman law made clear that someone who had been wronged could bring his opponent before the judge.

Don't miss this. The two could reconcile everything while they were on their way to see the judge. But once the court became involved reconciliation was taken out of their hands and placed in the hands of the judge. The guilty person would have to go to prison until he had fully paid for his criminal act. We must practice rapid reconciliation without any delay whatsoever!

How do we maintain healthy Christ honoring relationships in our family, within the church, and even with those we work with?

- **Guage the problem correctly**
- **Handle the problem decisively**

Everything Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount is designed to shatter our self-righteousness. He demonstrates that our righteousness is like filthy rags before a holy God. We need the righteousness that the Lord Jesus provides for those who receive Him as Savior and Lord!

CONCLUSION

Now for the rest of the story. Pastor Cho stood before the 1000 Japanese pastors and all the years of hatred and bitterness came out like a flood—***"I hate you. I hate you. I hate you."*** He wept and wept.

At first one, then two, then all 1000 pastors stood up. One by one they walked up to Pastor Cho, knelt at his feet and asked forgiveness for what their people had done. God moved mightily in Pastor Cho's heart and set Him free from the bitterness and hatred. He stood before those same pastors and said, ***"I love you. I love you. I love you."***

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CFBC... "The Sermon on the Mount" (Wednesday Night Study)