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What's Wrong with Private Sins?

Matthew 5:21-30

Anger, rudeness and vengeance can often seem justified when we have been antagonized. Private thoughts of lust may seem harmless. Jesus, however, calls these attitudes “murder” and “adultery.”

GROUP DISCUSSION. What advice would you give to someone who is struggling to get along with an irritating individual?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. In what ways has your thought life pleased or disappointed God this week?

The scribes and Pharisees calculated that the Law contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. But they were better at arithmetic than obedience. So they tried to make the Law's demands less demanding and the Law's permissions more permissive. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seeks to reverse this tendency. He came to deepen, not destroy, the Law's demands. In this passage he explains the true meaning of the sixth and seventh commandments, the prohibitions against murder and adultery. *Read Matthew 5:21-30.*

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1. What standard does Jesus use for determining right and wrong?

2. In verses 21-22 Jesus places murder and unrighteous anger in the same category. How are they related?

3. Jesus warns against calling someone *Raca* (an Aramaic word meaning “empty” or “stupid”) or “You fool” (v. 22). Why do you think insults such as these constitute murder in God’s sight?

4. What has caused you to lose your temper with people?

5. What do verses 23-26 teach us about broken relationships?

6. Why is Jesus concerned that reconciliation and apologies be made quickly?

7. When have you either initiated forgiveness or had someone initiate it with you?

What was the outcome?

8. What, according to Jesus, is the full meaning of the seventh commandment: “Do not commit adultery” (vv. 27-28)?

9. Lust has been compared to “a cannibal committing suicide by nibbling on himself.”* How have you seen lust hurt yourself and others?

10. Some Christians have taken verses 29-30 literally and have mutilated their bodies. How do you think Jesus intends us to understand his warnings?

In what situations might you need to “gouge out an eye” or “cut off a hand”?

Ask God to help you rid your life of anything that causes you to sin. Pray that you will be able to obey him in your attitudes as well as your actions.

Now or Later

The subjects of anger and sexuality are also addressed in 1 Corinthians 6. What does this passage add regarding the need to settle disputes quickly? What does it teach about the dangers of lust? If there is someone you have not forgiven, go to that person now and seek reconciliation.

*Calvin Miller, “A Requiem for Love,” *Christianity Today* 34, no. 2.