

# **Bible Studies for Life: Distinct in My Approach to Conflict**

January 20, 2016

- *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Feb. 7 focuses on Matthew 5:21-26.*

Political candidates are everywhere, and so is the news coverage of the candidates. As the candidates seek to set themselves apart from others, reporters covering the primary elections seek to set themselves apart from others by getting that “gotcha” moment with a candidate. It’s the moment when the candidate misstates something or contradicts something said before.

Christians have “gotcha” moments. It’s those times when we don’t act very Christ-like, when we fail to live as Jesus taught us to live, and when we just flat-out sin. One of the quickest ways Christians have “gotcha” moments is when we don’t handle our anger.

## **Avoid anger (Matthew 5:21-22)**

A quick reading of these verses can give the appearance Jesus was adding to the law. Note that Jesus is not increasing the law to say anger now is added to the Ten Commandments. He wants to show it’s what’s in our hearts that counts. It’s not just our actions. Murder happens after anger takes place, so cut off the anger and cut off the serious sin.

In some ways, anger, hatred and murder are all alike. They’re all sin. In a different way, one must recognize these sins are different. More than likely, we’ve all been the victim of someone’s anger or hatred, but none of us has been murdered. The results of the sins definitely differ.

Anger finds expression through shouting, hostility, fighting, loss of temper and physical abuse. It also may be found in more subtle ways of expression through negativity, cynicism, sarcasm, hostile humor, name calling, pouting and resentment.

Anger interferes with our personal growth, since it shuts down feedback. When we are overstimulated with anger, we don't want to listen to any voice of reason. We just want to know we are right and have been wronged. The goal of becoming more like Christ is out the window from our lives.

Jesus noted the seedbed for sin is the heart. Murder begins with anger, and for anger to have devastating consequences on relationships, families and careers, it doesn't have to result in murder. Anger begins with something that triggers it, but its flames are fueled when we entertain it in our thoughts.

### **Seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24)**

Jesus prohibits anger and condescending attitudes as a general principle. Anger in itself isn't a sin, for God gets angry (e.g. Jeremiah 23:20). However, anger means sin is couched at the door of one's life waiting to get in at the least slip. When the Apostle Paul discussed anger, he said, "Do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:27).

To control your anger and other emotions, you must control your thoughts. In Romans 12:2, Paul spoke about the renewing of one's mind. The way emotions are controlled is with the mind. Control your thoughts, because they fuel your emotions. It's not easy to change one's thoughts when angry, but God's grace will enable the process of change in your lives.

What upsets us to the point of sin? Usually, fear fuels our anger. We don't think or act fearfully, but the anger we experience results from a fear. Maybe it's fear of being out of control or the fear of looking foolish. Whenever anger erupts in our lives, an underlying fear usually can be

discovered.

When relationships have been affected, Jesus told us we must first seek reconciliation before we worship. How we act outside the confines of church affects what we do inside the church. Reconciliation takes work. It means compromise. It requires saying, "I'm sorry," even when we're right. Too often, we may be in the right during a conflict, but we act sinfully about being right. That means an apology is in order, despite being right.

### **Resolve differences (Matthew 5:25-26)**

In these final verses, it seems as if Jesus had the modern American church in mind. Today, churches are sued over frivolous matters. Someone's feelings may be hurt, and they think they must defend their rights in court. Another may fall and get hurt at church, so a trip to the courthouse is in order. Christians sue each other without regard to their witness concerning God's grace or furthering God's kingdom.

What difference will any of this make in 150 years? All Christians should pass their actions through this question: How will eternity be affected by our decisions, thoughts and actions right now.

The result of settling out of court will mean we will have to overpay. We will have to take slights and insults. We will seem weak. We also will know reality. We're not weak but meek. We're being insulted just as our Lord was. We won't have to overpay, because the only real wealth in the universe is in heaven. We will store our treasure there.

Our relationship with God partly is contingent on how we treat others. Those who truly experience and know the rich grace of God will treat others with grace, too. Paul said to think of others more highly than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). That's a good word.

Sinful anger damages a Christian's witness, so when anger rules a

Christian's life, repentance is necessary. Recognize the problem and turn away from it. Then, take positive steps for change that will involve getting help from others.