

FIRST, GET RIGHT WITH YOUR BROTHER

Jesus, in speaking to His disciples, shows that self-control over our physical actions is good, but the Lord wants us to control our thoughts and attitudes as well. Behind our actions are the inward thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Murder starts with hatred, and hatred is often expressed in “killer words” which then can lead to “killer actions”. Before God, how we talk to each other is reflective of the heart and very important. It is constantly a KEY issue in personal conflicts.

Matthew 5:23 (NKJV)

23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

To show you all the more that Christ has “**disciples**” in view, the thought from verse 22 continues on. The “**Therefore**” of verse 23 denotes a continuation of thought. Verses 21-22 denote a HATE problem in the heart that expresses itself in various ways. Verses 23-24 address how to get right after such sin has been committed.

Perhaps this person has a guilty conscience knowing they have wronged their brother by way of sinful anger, contemptuous insult, or malicious cursing, and therefore has brought a little “conscience money” (or in this case a “conscience offering” to try and sooth their conscience.

Christ’s audience was Jewish and pre-cross while the Temple was still standing, and so He spoke to them on that level. A person has come to the Temple with an offering seeking divine forgiveness. As he stands there waiting for his turn, he remembers that he has wronged someone in the sense of the sins mentioned in verse 22.

Christ says...

Matthew 5:24 (NKJV)

24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Isn't this a challenging verse? Christ is saying that before you can really worship God in an acceptable manner, you must first get right with your brother. First priority is to get right with your brother – even a higher priority than the offering.

“Worship of God is not accepted until reconciliation has been achieved with brothers with whom some offense has broken a relationship.”

– **Ed Glasscock**

People would generally much rather bring some ritualistic offering than get right with an offended brother. This is really humbling! This shows true repentance in which the ego bites the dust. Making a quiet offering is no big deal, but eating humble pie and crawling back to a wronged brother in repentance – now that is challenging.

Note, it is the offender here who is to take the initiative. They are to obey their conscience. They know they have done wrong. They know this person has something against them. There is a rift in the relationship. They are to make the first move. And this action of going back to first be reconciled could have involved some real effort. Here they were in Jerusalem at the Temple, but if the brother lived up in Galilee, that would involve a real commitment, involving trekking a hundred miles up and then back down again to the Temple.

Christ says, “Leave the Temple and your offering, **”and do whatever it takes to reconcile with your brother.”** This is TOP priority. The first step in getting right with God is getting right with your brother!

By the way, if you have been wronged, sometimes you just have to wait for God to work in the other person’s heart until they are humbled enough to come to you and seek reconciliation. We should always have a spirit of forgiveness, but reconciliation in this case depends on the offender taking the initiative.

First, we get right with our brother or sister – then we can worship in spirit and in truth. If we won’t get right, there is going to be an ongoing WALL between us and God.

“The moral is simple: We are to get right with those we have wronged, those who have something against us, those with whom we have been angry. Reconciliation is so important that Jesus said it must even take precedence over our worship of God.” – **John Phillips**

We see this principle emphasized every time we have communion. The Lord says we are to regularly remember Him and what He did at the cross to make us a forever family as we partake of communion.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul makes it very clear that before we can partake of communion in a worthy manner, we must FIRST be right with our brothers and sisters.

1 Corinthians 11:28–30 (NKJV)

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

In effect, many at Corinth were violating the Lord's principle here in Matthew 5:23-24. They were not right with each other and yet insisted on approaching the Lord's table in worship. Therefore, God disciplined them with sickness and even death. It is a serious matter before God!

“God receives no worship from a believer who is not on speaking terms with another.” – **William MacDonald**

Someone once told me that for years, they had a problem with another person in the church. They said they had learned to just stay on one side of the church while the other person was on the other. In dismay, I expressed that I just could not understand how that was possible. Well, as time went along, some serious discipline ensued, and it wasn't pretty.

If you are a kingdom citizen, you can't live this way without disciplinary consequences (see Heb. 12). True God-honoring worship starts with being right with the family of God!

I know of a case where a brother seriously wronged another believer. To this day, the errant brother defends himself and has not gotten right. I have often said that in this case, “**repentance runs through the offended party**”. Evidence of true repentance is when the guilty party humbles themselves and, first and foremost, seeks to get right with the person they have sinned against. Then God can bless. Then, restored worship of God can take place.

Believers guilty of the “family sins” related to the seeds of murder, as seen in Matthew 5:22, need to deal with it by FIRST being reconciled to their brother. Only then can God bless.