

**Q & A with Jesus, Part 1**

For the last few weeks, we've been sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening with rapt attention, as he speaks the Sermon on the Mount. He utters deep truths for pondering and putting into practice. The Beatitudes – blessed are you, even when it doesn't feel or seem like it. You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world – that's what you are; so be that bright light, that preserving salt this world needs. Jesus said, "I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law and live the law perfectly in your place. And now I'm teaching you how to live the law."

Today Jesus definitely teaches us how to live the law. He brings us right back to the Ten Commandment, and he challenges us! In this Sermon on the Mount Jesus is challenging us to live the law of God in our hearts and lives. But these words raise all kinds of questions. It seems like every other verse I'm asking myself, "What does he mean here?" I could see the first listeners on mountain raising their hands like kids in school: "Wait, Jesus, I have a question. What do you mean by that? Can you explain that for me? How am I supposed to do that in my life?" Questions and answers. So today we have a Q & A with Jesus.

Here's the first question: Jesus, you said murder is wrong, and we all agree with that. But you also said that it's wrong to be angry. What's wrong with being angry at someone? What if they say bad things about you or do mean things to you? It's okay to be angry then, right? Answer: the Fifth Commandment ("You shall not murder") is about more than just murder. You don't keep this commandment simply by refraining from homicide. You can murder someone with your thoughts or with your words. The root cause of murder is sinful anger in the heart, and Jesus wants us to root out of our heart all that anger. He condemns hatred and anger. He says, **"I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."** Among Christian there should be no trace of malicious anger – not in our actions (which may result in actually killing); not in our thoughts (which result in bitterness, hatred, grudges, ill will); and not even in our words (which result in hurtful insults, like "fool" or "raca," which means something like "idiot"). You think about that next time you talk trash about someone or insult them. **"Anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."**

Here's another question: Jesus, there must be such a thing as righteous anger. Even God gets angry at sin, and the book of Proverbs calls unbelievers fools all the time. So, Jesus, what do you want us to do? What kind of behavior are you looking for? Answer: reconciliation. Jesus wants reconciliation, among all people, but especially between believers. That's why Jesus says, **"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,"** (because you've sinned against them, hurt them, or insulted them), then **"leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them."** Go and make peace with the person you've hurt! You cannot come to church, you cannot come to Communion and think you are fine with God when you are not fine with a fellow believer. You cannot practice the Christian religion if you refuse to make peace with others. Jesus demands that you reconcile. Listen to what he says, **"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court."** Maybe you're not going to court over anything. But the point is: make immediate efforts to reestablish peace. Anything less is unworthy of the kingdom.

So now here's a question for you: whom have you offended? Whom do you tick off? Answer: only you know. Or maybe you don't know; or maybe you know people are mad at you but you don't know why. That can happen. What should you do then? Well, Romans 12 says, **"Live in harmony with one another... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (16-18).** You can't always control how people feel about you. But you can seek peace. So, here's what you need do: you need to swallow your pride and go apologize; you need to quit being a jerk, and start being the salt of the earth. Jesus said, **"Blessed are the peacemakers."** Peacemakers don't go around thinking: "Oh, I'm such a great person because I've never killed anyway." No, a peacemaker works hard to flush the anger from his heart and mind. A peacemaker does not insult people or talk trash about people. A peacemaker apologizes to those she offends. A peacemaker is kind and loving, humble and gentle. A peacemaker seeks peace. Are you a peacemaker, or are you an angry, hateful jerk? 1 John 3 says, **"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer" (15).** Look where hatred led Cain. So yes, anger is a big deal to Jesus.

Here's another question: Jesus, you talked about adultery and lust. But come on! If you keep your hands to yourself, you can still enjoy scenery, right? You can "look but don't touch," right? No way! **"I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** And guess what, ladies: the same applies to you. "Anyone who looks at a man lustfully has already committed adultery with him in her heart." So no, lust is not okay! Just as anger equals murder, so also lust equals adultery. And the Sixth Commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." And Jesus is so strong on this that he actually, graphically says, **"If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."** And if we're honest, we all should be coming to church with missing eyes and severed limbs, because we are all guilty of lust.

So here's a question: Does Jesus literally want us to cut off our body parts? Answer: no, because Jesus knows that even if you literally cut off parts of your body, the sinful sexual thoughts of your imagination will still dance around in your mind. Your most sexual body part is not covered with Fruit of the Loom. It's covered with your skull; it's your mind. And what Jesus is teaching us here is that he desires sexual purity not only in our actions but also in our mind.

So then here's a follow-up question: how do you attain that sexual purity? Well, besides the obvious truth that any physical sex outside of marriage is always sinful, the answer here is: you're not going to be sexually pure by looking at dirty magazines or watching sexually graphic shows or scrolling through racy pictures on your phone. Notice, Jesus says, "**Anyone who looks.**" Your eyes are your first line of defense. And if you bring filth in through your eyes, then your mind will be filthy, as well. So, another question: what should we do? Answer: don't look! Don't look at those pictures or watch those shows; don't let that garbage into your mind, because once it's in, it's hard to get it out. And Jesus is serious about this! He says, "Gouge out your eye if you have to; cut off your hand. It's better than going to hell."

Now here's something else Jesus is serious about: divorce. Sensitive subject, I know; but we're going there, because Jesus goes there! Here's the question: Jesus, if you just don't love your spouse anymore, if the spark just isn't there anymore, isn't it better to get a divorce? And J thunders with divine authority: "No, divorce is wrong; it's a serious sin!" Things today are no different than they were back in Jesus' day: people think that divorce is no big deal, kind of like breaking up with your high school date to the prom. Well, against this casual view of marriage Jesus thunders, "Divorce is sin; it shatters the sacred union God intended to be lifelong." Divorce is never God's will or intention. Jesus' stance on divorce is exceedingly clear.

So here's another sensitive question: could there be some circumstances where one spouse is guilty of the sin of divorce, but the other is innocent? And the answer here is a definite yes; there are some exceptions. Jesus himself said, "**Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery.**" And in 1 Corinthians Paul says, "**If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace**" (7:15). This is a big subject, but the short answer is: if someone cheats on their spouse, or physically abuses or verbally harasses or heartlessly abandons their spouse, the other is free to seek a divorce and is not guilty of sin. But the other person most certainly is guilty of sin! Do not forget what Jesus says later in Matthew: "**They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate**" (Mt 19:6). And in Malachi 2 we read, "**The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? ... 'I have divorce,' says the Lord God of Israel**" (14-16).

This is serious, and it leads to another serious, overarching question: Jesus, I have caused a divorce. I have cheated on my spouse. I have looked at porn. I have committed adultery, in my flesh and in my mind. I have harbored hatred for others. I have refused to reconcile. I have committed murder in my thoughts. I am guilty. And every one of us here today needs to hear Jesus' words and come to the same conclusion: I am guilty, whatever the sin may be. Which brings us to the big question of the day: Jesus, what do I do now? What do I do? What do I do with my sin, with this guilt – because I can't just undo my infidelity; I can't un-see those images or turn back the clock and un-say those words or un-think those thoughts. So what do I do now?

Jesus' answer: repent! Repent, repent, repent, repent – which means, first of all, actually acknowledge before God that what you have done is sinful. Then, turn away from your sin. If you're in the middle of a sin, STOP; if you're being tempted to sin, DON'T! And finally, take your sin to Jesus, dump it at foot of the cross, ask Jesus for forgiveness, and put your trust in the Lamb of God who takes away sin of world. That is THE most important answer to THE biggest question of all. What do I do with my sin? Repent of it and find forgiveness in Jesus. Find forgiveness in Jesus who is so opposite of hatred that he actually forgave those who crucified him, while they were doing it. And if he forgives them, he certainly forgives you! Find forgiveness in Jesus who is so pure in heart that he can actually transfer his purity onto you so that the Father now sees you as holy and blameless. Find forgiveness in Jesus who is our bridegroom, who loves us his bride – even though we are an unfaithful bride. But our bridegroom laid down his life on the cross in our place; he suffered the torments of hell in profound love for us; he made reconciliation between us and God, so that now we are fully and freely forgiven. That is your answer! What do you do with your sin? Repent and find forgiveness in your Savior Jesus!

And then put these words of the Sermon on the Mount into practice in your life. Live what Jesus teaches here. If you reject what Jesus teaches here, then you reject J, and you reject your forgiveness, and you reject eternal life, and you're condemned already. But if you believe that you have sinned against God, and that you are forgiven by God, and that you now have a new life to live for God – then you're on the right path, because you're asking the right questions and you're finding the right answers. We'll continue with the Sermon on the Mount next Sunday, right where we left off here: Q & A with Jesus, Part 2.