

Heart Failure

How to Attack a Heart of Hate

February 13, 2022

Good morning Valentines! How we all doin'? If you're visiting, welcome home. I'm Bruce, I'll be your server, and today we're talking about how to attack a heart that has hatred hiding inside.



Happy Valentine's Day! **Ever wish someone dead?**



Not so much in such obvious terms, of course, but **that subtle, insidious, sin of animosity, that masquerades as righteous anger** and makes itself oh-so easy to ignore and-or justify. "I don't wish 'em harm. I just wish they'd disappear. We'd all be better off without 'em. Am I wrong?" Probably *not*. Probably true of a lot. So **who do you wish would just disappear?**



In my teens, a magician friend and I took a bus to Pike Place, to meet a man at the magic store, who drove us to an old apartment building to show us some tricks he had for sale. And when we got to the end of this long, dark hallway, there was a handful of Nightshade nailed to his door. He looked at it, and then at us, and said, "That must be from my girlfriend; I guess we're breaking up." So, **who do you wish dead?** Like *that*.



Last Sunday we saw **the sacred hatred of sin**, as well as **the sin of harboring hatred (for the sinner) in our heart**. Same rules apply to *anger*. On that seaside hillside, Jesus was teaching His newly appointed teenage apprentices a **surpassing righteousness of loving obedience from a changed heart** – which requires God to reveal *His* heart in such a *profound* way that it transforms *every* heart that *embraces* it – which requires *us* to seek *His* heart with all *our* heart.



Meanwhile, the blind guides of Jesus' day were teaching a **self-righteousness of external, behavioral, compliance**, devoid of *love* as its *motivation*, which *inevitably* results in: **charity without compassion; prayer without devotion; worship without joy; and judgment without grace**. Ever catch *yourself* doing any of that? You've *done* it. We *all* have. I'm just curious if you've *caught* yourself – or if you're like those blind ol' Pharisees in Jesus' day.

What Jesus is working *into* His boys, is **faith from the inside out**. Not *merely* virtuous *external* conduct, which is *difficult but doable*, but virtuous *internal* conduct, which is *basically impossible* without eagerly embracing transforming which, as we saw, requires some basic *un-learning*.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' [An out-of-context justification for reflexive retaliation] But I tell you, [Remember: Jesus isn't correcting Scripture, but false teaching. And in specific reference to those blind religious rivals, He says] do not resist an evil person. [Specifically, a cheek-slapper] If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other [the left cheek] also." – Matthew 5:38-39 NIV



Why do you think He's so *oddly specific* about the "right cheek"? "But if they strike the left cheek first: POW!" Actually it's because there's something *distinct* about the *left hand*. It was reserved for any distinctly unclean needs, which rendered it *da'stinky* hand! Therefore, it was *never* used to touch *food* or *others* without bringing *shame* and *punishment*. The mere act of pointing at a person with the left hand got you ten days of banishment and penance! (Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QS 7) So **the left was never used to slap. They used the right hand to backhand the right cheek;** because a backhanded slap is a fairly universal symbol of insult, like a backhanded *compliment*, but more *obvious*.

This slap wasn't meant to injure *physically*, but to *insult* and *dishonor* *publically*. **It's a hit to your pride.** A *big* hit. The ancient Jewish Mishnah records the fines, of Jesus' day (for *shame-based* violence that causes only minor *physical* pain), based on *degree of disgrace*.

For instance (when an average day's pay was three bucks in today's money), a **punch in the face** would run you **60 cents** ... *per punch*. A **knee to the groin, \$1.80** (more than half a day's pay). Whereas, a **palm slap to the face** was a **\$30** insult; and a **backhanded slap** would set you back **\$60!** Twenty days' pay. But, realizing you could punch someone in the face 90 times, *and* give 'em a *knee to boot*, in *response* to their *backhanded* slap, and *they'd* still owe you \$4.20 ... *priceless!* *Funny*, but not *true*. Because you could cause *major shame*, but only *minor pain*. But that \$60 price tag reveals how *publically humiliating* and *pridefully injurious* a *right* cheek slap truly was!

So Jesus is getting His boys "pray-pared" for an equally shocking response their blind enemies won't see coming: "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other"; **reset your face, and brace yourself**, for a \$30 palm slap on the *left* cheek! And don't even think about collecting, because *these* are the *guys* who enforce the *fin*es. And don't think about *paybacks*. Know why? Cuz no eye-for-an-eye. Okay? Aye-aye! So **when you have the perfect comeback, refuse to strike back**. Open yourself up, even *set* yourself up, in *love*, to further *insult*. Because they won't see *that* coming! And *that's* why it'll give 'em *pause*.

Just a few days earlier, they'd been abused by those blind religious leaders when Jesus healed a withered hand on a *Sabbath*. And "the Pharisees went out and *plotted* how they might *kill* Jesus." (Mt 12:14) We're way past *wishing!* Imagine how those hypocrites had treated Jesus' *boys*. I'll bet there was a *striking* difference between Jesus' *response* and His boys' *reactions*. And thus this little heart-to-heart to get to the heart of their own murderous intentions.

"You have heard [from those hypocrites] that it was said [in Scripture] to those of old, [led by Moses] 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' [Unless they repent] But I say to you [correcting their incomplete understanding of its full meaning] that whoever is [even] angry with his brother without a [righteous] cause [like anger toward injustice and abuse; and sacred hatred of sin (Eph 4:26)] shall be in *danger* of the judgment [of God]. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council." – Matthew 5:21-22 NKJ

Literally, the *Sanhedrin*, the Jewish authority over Jesus and His boys; the authorities they were constantly at odds with; and the men who found Him guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death.

[So, back up] “And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” – Matthew 5:22 NKJ

Here’s the incredible Jesus-twist: **both words basically mean the same. But ‘Raca’ was a profanity subject to the authority.** It’s like, if I use a profane word for poo-poo, from the pulpit, I’d be in much deeper *do-doo* than if I used two acceptable synonyms that mean the *exact same thing*. See there what I did-did?

Angry f-bombs are bad; but their clean counterparts can be far more deadly. F-bombs will be judged by the religious, but anyone who uses an acceptable term that basically means the same thing is in *danger* of a far greater self-destruction, due to self-delusion.



Think about what we allow ourselves, and other believers, to get away with saying, as long as we use our own preapproved synonyms for words we would *never* allow *otherwise*. So **who do you wish would disappear?**



Jesus’ point is that **the lesser external evil, often poses the greater internal threat.** Because it’s far *less obvious*, and therefore far *more likely* to be justified, accommodated, and ignored. You can’t ignore *physical* murder; but **we sure deceive ourselves about heart murder.** Especially if it *feels* like *righteous anger* and nothing more than a *wish* they’d just *disappear*.



For instance, if a tire blows out, you’re stuck; you got’a deal with it. But, if that oil light comes on, you can ignore it, get used to it even. “Hello, little engine light. You don’t seem so serious.” Because, it isn’t ... until it *is*. In the long run, **the lesser is worse if we accommodate it.** This is when Jesus says:



“Therefore if you bring your gift [now yourself (Rom 12:1)] to the altar, [now the cross (Heb 13:10-13)] and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. [A living sacrifice. (Rom 12:1) So, go and] Agree with your adversary [regarding how you offended them; and do it] quickly, [because no matter your motive, or their misconduct, you did. You offended them. So don’t waste time arguing how they shouldn’t be offended, or how they brought it on themselves, or how they offended you. Go. Listen. And agree – because it’s true, they were offended by you. So don’t compromise the truth, but do apologize for the offense] ... lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. [Cuz that’s how the Sanhedrin worked] Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” – Matthew 5:23-26 NKJ

I have a chart. These are the *pennies* He’s referring to. Which means they likely fought back. Which explains why Jesus is telling ‘em how they’ll have to behave if they want to be *His* disciples. And if they have any cents, they better keep their hands to themselves.

And, I can't imagine that Jesus didn't show the boys this OT passage in Lamentations:



The Lord is good to those whose hope is in *Him*, to the one who seeks *Him*; it is good to wait *quietly* for the salvation of the *Lord*. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while He is *young*. Let him sit alone in silence ... Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be *filled* with *disgrace*. – Lamentations 3:25-30 NIV

“Do you boys realize you kept those stubborn teachers from recalling this Scripture, and getting slapped in the face with *Truth*? **If you'll offer your pride, they'll examine this passage, and maybe themselves.** But if you use *their* standards, you'll keep those blind hypocrites in the dark.”

So, how about *you*? **Do you treat your adversaries the way they treat you?** Eye-for-eye? It's only *fair*. By *their* standards. It's just not *just*, by our *Father's*. As much as we may despise *them*, because of our love for *Him*, **shouldn't we try to treat 'em to a sample of our salvation?** Who knows? Maybe they'll ...

Taste and see that the Lord is good; [and that] blessed is the one who takes refuge in *Him*.
[Rather than the ways of the world] – Psalm 34:8-9 NIV



Anger itself isn't sin, but it's often the trigger. It's all about how we're “pray-pared” to handle it when it comes. Ever know a believer who rarely if ever shoots off their mouth? Don't think they don't ever *feel* like pitching a verbal *fit*. They've just learned to keep their safety on. Because, **we can't control our triggers, but we can control our tongue.**

A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back. – Proverbs 29:11 NKJ

Because we're so prone to say and do – and especially *think* – sinful, malicious, counter-productive, things when we're mad. Because anger clouds *our* judgment. So do your best to ...

Be angry, [with a *right* cause] and yet do not sin; [by letting that anger find its way in; and] do not let the sun go down on your anger, [Act fast! Face it. And deal with it – with that *safety on!*] and do not give the devil an opportunity. – Ephesians 4:26-27 NAS

Which means **I must stop excusing myself and accusing the other.** Which is *downright impossible*, without a heart that's being transformed by the heart of God.

We can't afford to wait for them to take the initiative. And plus, why would we want to?



We love because *He* first loved us. [Why would we want to rob our Father of our living sacrifice?] If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, [in his heart, without cause] he is a liar. – 1 John 4:19-20 NIV

As in, “pants on fire” ... *unless they repent; the quicker the better!*