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## Grace to Live - Removing Hate

Matthew 5:21-26 | Sunday, August 12, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

# GRACE TO LIVE REMOVING HATE Matthew 5:21-26

*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

In last week's message we began this section. Really, the rest of chapter 5 talks to us about a life that pleases God in very specific terms, how we treat other people. I think it's accurate to say, and forgive me for this little bit of a technical term, but it's actually very helpful. We look at the Ten Commandments and we say there are two tables. You may have seen a picture of Moses coming down off the mountain with two tablets. We talk about the two tablets or two tables of the law. The first table, or the first tablet, commands 1-4, deal with our relationship with God. Jesus summarized all of the law and the prophets in one great command: **Love the Lord your God with all that you are.**

The second table, the second tablet, commands 5 through 10, deal with our relationship with other people, beginning with the fifth commandment, which talks about honoring mother and father. It's a very important commandment and in some ways you can see it almost as a transition from the first table to the second, in that a child in a Christian home learns to express faith by honoring mom and dad, by obeying mom and dad.

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The term “obey” kind of makes us bristle a little bit in today’s culture, but it’s a very biblical concept. There is a specific promise that accompanies that command. “That it may go well with you. That you will live long. That you’ll know God’s blessing in your life.” It seems like works, like “I’ll earn a long, good life.” But it’s actually meant to invite that child into a place of faith and trust in God. I’m going to trust God to lead me through an imperfect parent. So that transitions into the second tablet, which talks to us about how we treat other people. Today’s passage is very important, foundational for all that follows in the rest of this chapter.

Here’s how I want you to view this. Here is the lens. **Jesus is now going to teach you how to internalize truth.** Remember we said last week that he doesn’t do away with the law? We are not to live lawless lives now. We don’t relate to God based on our ability to keep the rules. But now we’re not rule breakers. He actually does something the law couldn’t do. He internalizes God’s truth.

We are going to see how Jesus does that in a very specific area, how we treat other people. He takes us through a kind of progression. We’ll read this phrase a lot in the rest of chapter 5: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, but I say to you...” He is contrasting his interpretation of the law and what really pleases God with what has been traditionally heard. In this case he deals with the sixth commandment, the very first major commandment in terms of the moral law and how we treat other people, generally speaking. Don’t kill them, right? Do not murder. He says, “You shall not murder (that’s what you’ve heard); and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...”

Here is the heart of the issue. When I hear about the murders that took place, the shootings that took place at Douglas High School, something in me is so troubled and grieved. I remember exactly where I was when I found out that shooting took place. I was in a strange place, in a strange city. I was on vacation. I happened to be alone in that moment, and in that moment I just wanted to be with my wife. I wanted to be with my children. I wanted to be with you. I wanted to leave vacation right then and immediately be with the people that are dear to me.

The thought of indiscriminately taking human life just pierces our hearts. And Jesus tells us that that is actually right and true, and that **God views hate for other people with a similar distaste and disapproval. That cringe within us when we hear about taking human life should rise up within us whenever hate for other humans is present. To put it in the positive, the foundation for how all of the moral law is lived out is: We love people. We think they’re precious. They are made in the**

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**image of God. They are dear. We want to remove all hatred of other people, so what springs from that is the realization that it's not enough to go about life saying, "Well, I won't kill people; I know that's wrong," but that hate is unacceptable. People are to be cherished. They are to be esteemed. They are indispensable. They are irreplaceable. They are priceless. They are dear. They are exquisite. They are to be respected.**

So how does Jesus do that? I'm going to give you a simple outline. First, he narrows the command. He gets very specific, very narrow in his application. I'll explain that in a second. Then he tells us no substitutes are allowed and no delays are tolerated.

Let's jump into #1.

### I. **Jesus narrows the command.** Verses 21 and 22.

I think here of something that happens at the end of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says to enter by the narrow gate. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." The person who is coming to Jesus finds out that the way into Jesus is very difficult and very easy. It's a contradiction. You have this text which describes the difficulty of it, but in Matthew's gospel, right from the mouth of Jesus, he later says, "Come and follow me. My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Well, how can that be? It's so difficult to follow Jesus. It's very narrow. It's very hard. Few there be that find it. The easy way is broad, but it leads to destruction. Coming to Jesus is saying, "I will not trust at all in my own goodness, in my own rightness. I will die to myself and I will live completely dependent on God, completely trusting in him." When I do that, I receive everything I need in Jesus, the complete gift of salvation.

In the same regard, the person who follows Jesus (listen very carefully) and sets out on the Christian life, saying, "Now I'm a Christian. I no longer live for myself. I have received salvation. I have received forgiveness. I have received eternal life" - he finds out that Jesus' commands are very difficult! "Call your brother a fool and you are in danger of hell." Wow. Jesus' expectation of how he wants us to view and treat other people is really severe, isn't it? It's narrow.

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I would encourage you to make these applications, starting in the relationships closest to you - your closest family members and friends. To follow Christ in those relationships will look like, "Man, this is so difficult. What Jesus wants me to do with my finances, how he wants me to treat other people - this is so difficult." Then it leads to life. It opens up in this broad expanse and is life-giving. That's the picture.

So, how does Jesus do that here? How does Jesus narrow the command? He says, "Okay, listen. It's not this big, broad, open, easy command: Don't murder. Everyone who doesn't murder is okay." No, no, no, no. He gives a progression. He says if you insult your brother you are liable to the local authorities. "Anyone who is angry with his brother (I'm going to call it the local authorities) - you are liable to judgment." Then he moves from anger to insulting. "Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council." That's probably like the Sanhedrin -- the official Supreme Court, if you will, of Israel.

There is a progression until the third, "...whoever says, 'You fool!' (or 'Raca' literally, which means "empty headed") will be liable to the hell of fire and eternal judgment." Possibly, he is going from a local authority to a national authority to God. I think that progression makes sense. Then he is going from hatred to insult to anger to insult to this specific term where you call your brother a fool.

Let's talk about the last one for a minute, because I think it helps us get understanding into what Jesus is teaching. The fool is not just an insult. It's not just a name that you call someone. It's a specific category in scripture. When you read the book of Proverbs, for example, you find out that there is this constant contrast between the wise person and the fool. The fool is someone who is destructive. They are dangerous to have around because they are contagiously destructive. You don't ever want to hire a fool, because not only will you not get your money's worth out of that person, but they will actually affect the work of everybody else.

Also, we are told that the fool in Proverbs is unteachable. No matter what you do, he or she will not receive instruction. There are these proverbs that are like, "Beat him a hundred times and he won't get it." "A wise son you give verbal instruction to and it clicks. He responds. He is teachable. He walks in humility." You have these categories laid out, describing this class of person.

The term "he is just empty-headed" really is helpful here. What Jesus is addressing here is when you just say, "This person is beyond hope, beyond help. I want nothing to do with him. I am writing them off. I am dismissing them from life."

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You remember the illustration I've used from time to time about children when they're young? We would make our kids eat their vegetables. But once in a while in a weak moment they'd say, "Can I not eat my carrots, please?" You think about the last battle where you had carrots and you are thinking, "I don't have grace for that battle." "Okay, tonight you don't have to eat your carrots." What do they do? They immediately take the carrots off their plate and put them on your plate. They are announcing to everyone at the table: "I am no longer responsible for these carrots." This is what we do relationally. We write people off. We categorize them and take them off our plate and say, "I am no longer responsible."

I was in Eastern Europe a long time ago, trying to share with a young pastor. He was in conflict with an older pastor and he made this statement to me. He said: "He is not a Christian." I replied, "He is literally not a Christian?!" He goes, "No. No, his behavior is so reprehensible he's not even a Christian." I said to this brother, "You know what you are trying to do? You are trying to release yourself from the responsibility you have to a Christian brother. And if you convince yourself he's not a Christian, now you can dismiss him. Now you can write him off. Now you don't have to work to reconcile. You don't have to work to get right. I am no longer accountable because this brother is no longer my brother."

We do that. I think that's the progression Jesus is describing. It's not just a level of offense. It's where hate takes us. Then there is a fork in the road. We have anger in our heart toward a person. It's just one type of anger. We are insulting toward them, we begin to look down on them, and then there is this fork in the road. This fool takes two expressions when we dismiss someone and write them off.

1. You move towards literal murder. You get violent. That's how hate expresses itself in the heart of some people. You get aggressive. You get verbal. You get loud.
2. Then the other person: You remove yourself. You dismiss them by making yourself unavailable.

Those are the two types of people - the aggressive person, the passive/aggressive. Usually what happens is: these two fall in love and get married. That's normally what happens. You get married. You have your first marital spat. One person wants to work it out. The other person is hiding in the bedroom, and God obviously has a purpose in that.

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It's not unusual to see people who take this right fork in the road, this passive attitude, who are married, who have been years and years without meaningful conversation, intimate conversation, intimate physical activity, because hate has grown into this: "You are no longer relevant to me." Jesus is addressing this in a very aggressive way. He is saying, "I want the seed of that to not be tolerated. Get aggressive. Get vigilant in removing hate from your heart."

Interestingly enough, the place that he describes is not just a general term for hell. Gehenna is the word that's used. The person who says, "You fool" is in danger of Gehenna. Now, Gehenna was a literal place which was outside of Jerusalem, which was the trash dump, where all the trash would be taken and burned. I think it's fascinating to think that when we say, "You are no longer relevant; you don't matter," and we give ourselves permission to do that, we are actually on a path toward Gehenna. **We are actually on a path of becoming less alive ourselves.**

Jesus is warning against this. He is saying, "You don't understand. How could anyone murder?" Jesus is saying that's the cut of the narrowness, the knife that pierces. You don't get the seriousness of hate. People are precious. Just as we would say, a person who can indiscriminately take life, **Jesus is saying a person who can indiscriminately hate doesn't understand that they are dead inside. They need new life. They need an awakening. They need a resurrection and they can't come by it naturally. They can only come by it with an infusion of grace and divine life.**

That's the first point. The second and third are much longer. They're not actually. If you get that, the next two then follow relatively quickly.

### II. **No substitutes.** Verses 23 and 24.

This is something a pastor has probably never told you, but Jesus said it. **If you are giving and you're not right with other people, don't give.** The picture is actually the picture of a sacrifice that's being offered. But I think that Jesus is using that to teach us about worship in general. Your worship, your sacrifice to God can never be a substitute for allowing yourself to hate other people. You cannot buy your way out of this offense.

We do this, don't we? We tell ourselves, "I know that I'm not doing the right thing here, but I'm giving here," or "I'm doing this over here." "I'm doing this active charity," or "I'm praying," or, "I'm

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making a contribution.” Jesus dismantles that whole approach. He says to leave your gift, go to the altar, first be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.

We are confronted right now in our culture with a number of examples. Urban Meyer, very famous, very successful college football coach, is under investigation. He has been accused of having an assistant who was physically abusive to his wife. Urban Meyer has been accused of knowing that and tolerating it, keeping this coach on staff.

There is a lot of conversation going on about how serious that is. I would just say that obviously we don't know all the facts. We are only getting sound bites in some cases. But what's happening is that culturally we are saying it's not okay to say this woman doesn't matter, that she can be physically abused, and that's okay if he's a good coach. There is a certain responsibility that the people in authority have to respond and insist on justice being brought and protection being brought. We can debate that. I just want to illustrate the core issue of how it all connects - that people matter! **Every person matters.** And this truth comes to the heart of every issue of life.

Another difficult cultural expression is what happened in Charlottesville, Virginia. We come now to the anniversary of some very difficult, very hateful things that have transpired. It's difficult for me to comprehend. Some of the expressions of white supremacy that exist within our culture are troubling. They are really troubling. They should trouble you whether you're white or black or whatever you are. There are divisions that now cascade out of that, with difficulties navigating through how to understand history. And how do we make it right?

Here is something that will really help you. It's very difficult to pay for murder. It's very difficult to pay for slavery, right? But there is one substitute that Jesus provided, that God will accept on your behalf, whatever your sin is, and that is the substitute of his Son. He says there is no other substitute.

I believe that the Church could experience an anointing of the love of God to be relevant in difficult places like Charlottesville, and to be relevant in conversations about domestic violence that would flow from more than just an agenda on the positions, that would flow from a God-given love for people that God awakens in our hearts. Because we need supernatural solutions.

**III. No delays.** Verses 25 and 26.

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These last two verses are a little difficult for us to get our minds around. How does this fit, because there has already been a reference to judgment? I think it's an illustration. He says, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." Jesus is saying that not only can we substitute one form of obedience for another - we cannot - we rely on Jesus, the perfect substitute, we receive forgiveness, then we begin to deal aggressively with this sin. But then he says, "Don't put it off. Do it right now. Don't delay removing hate from your heart. Remove your offense and do everything that you can to be reconciled to another."

We had a unique situation here where we were sued as a church. We had a lawsuit brought against us by another church. That church was a tenant. In short, one of the tenants, a grocery store - their coolers leaked into the church next door to it and that tenant sued us and the grocery store. It went on for four or five years. It was a very troubling experience.

I had been to mediation a number of times. The last time I went we were two weeks away from the trial, and here's what happened. The elders were praying. They were demanding from the church \$750,000. So, I was going to have to come to you that next Sunday and say, "Hey, give us \$750,000," right? So I go to this mediation and now I know the mediator better than I want to. And sitting across from me is this other pastor and about 10 people. He has brought a bunch of his leaders. They were sitting there and we were using a translator. I tell our attorney that the insurance company is paying for that I'm going to address these pastors. He goes, "No, no, no. No, you're not." I said, "Listen, I am going to address these pastors." "No, no, no, you're not." "Listen, I'm *going* to address these pastors."

So, I got out the Bible and read from 1 Corinthians, where one Christian is not to sue another. I just made a simple statement: "Listen, we are followers of Jesus Christ. We cannot go into a courtroom and dishonor the name of Jesus in two weeks. We cannot do this." Here was the amazing thing. I'm not going to tell you the names of the churches, but both of their pastors even just this week were texting me, telling me they were praying for me, that they loved me. I knew these churches. I knew these pastors. They were strong, active Christians in the community. I looked right at them and said, "We cannot do this!" And my attorney said, "Stop. Stop, this is not going to help." But the mediator said, "Don't stop him." And I said, "I'm not stopping."

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So I made this appeal. I said, "Listen, if you think we have deep pockets at this church, we don't. There is no big pool of money. The insurance company has told us they're not paying damages." So here's what happened out of that. We spent all day in mediation. At the end of the day, we came from \$750,000, and we paid \$4000. I would call that a success, right? Thank you, God.

Here's part of how God worked it out. Sometimes people will say, "Oh wow, that's bad that we had to do that." Listen, God brings us into these situations to sanctify us, to create faith, for us to be a light. The mediator actually got me alone and said, "Could show me that passage of scripture again? My girlfriend has been taking me to another church, Calvary Chapel, and I've been visiting over there." I said, "That's a good church. That's great. Go. You'll hear the gospel. The pastor is a good friend. He's a good teacher, not as good as what you'll hear at Riverside, but he's good."

Seriously, I said, "That's great," and I showed him the passage. There was a testimony to the attorney that represented us. At the end of the day, the insurance company had sent a representative all the way from California, who was a follower of Jesus Christ and had opened her home for another pastor to live in. Her heart was moved to help us. There was this moving together of activity where God did a wonderful work of grace.

Now, here's why I told you that long story. I had real concern in my heart two weeks away from going to court. "Anything could happen, right? Anything. We could have this massive settlement against us." I might have to come to the church and say, "I don't know what we're going to do." There was this urgency. I felt like I don't care if I spend the night here. We have to come to terms. And that's the picture Jesus uses. **Do not tolerate offense in your heart. Dig it out. Dig it up. Get it out. It's a destroyer.**

His admonition to us, which is so powerful, is one that is saying, "In my case you are worried about the adversary. And that's real, but..." God says, "Who you really need to worry about is me!" You hear about a mass murder and you say, "I want justice!" And you should. That's a righteous anger. **God looks at your hate of people made in the image of God and he says, "I will have justice. I will not tolerate that unforgiveness and hate. I have given my precious Son so that you can be free."** That's so powerful.

I know we are supposed to be dismissing right now, but we're not going to dismiss for four or five minutes, okay? Great. So listen carefully. I think there's a priority that happens as you look at the commands. He is going to talk about sexual sin. He's going to talk about marriage and divorce. He's

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going to talk about other areas. **It all builds on understanding that people are precious.**

Sometimes the church gets to the command on divorce, which is really narrow, because that's how Jesus cuts into our hard hearts to get us to see it, that we begin to value marriage over people.

God has a very high view of marriage, a higher view of any of us, but not a view that tells a woman to just live with getting beaten. Do you hear me? Not a view that despises individuals. You get the point. There is a hierarchy here that begins with this.

I look at the impossibility of dealing with racism in our country, how there is such a challenge here of coming to grips with the reality, the ramifications that just ripple out and out and out and out of hating people. Why? Because their skin is dark. You, as a believer in Jesus Christ, need to be *appalled* at that. You may not have the answer to: Do we take down a Confederate general's statue? You may not know how to navigate through that debate. Well, start with: **Am I appalled at the sin of hundreds of years that made this possible in the country where I live? I recognize that politics become nuanced and become complicated, but racism is not. It's hate. We cannot tolerate it as followers of Jesus Christ.**

There are a lot of secondary applications that could be made. We receive people of all sorts and all types. We receive children, for example, Jesus said, because they are valuable. In a lot of cultures they are dismissed. As we go back to school we say, "No, no, no, every child in the classroom, every student is valuable." But those applications are secondary. The primary application, so that we don't miss it, is this: **Don't tolerate hate in your heart, in any form. Don't substitute anything except Jesus for that hate. When you do that, he will get it out. He will lead you to get it out. And don't delay. Deal with it aggressively.** Amen?

Lord, we pray for Riverside and every person hearing this message to be a light, like a city set on a hill. There are individuals here, Lord, who are hearing this message and are thinking of specific applications in their own lives. I just pray, Lord, that they would not get ahead of themselves, but that they would just let you deal right now with their hearts -- so that before they try to solve it, they would say, "Okay Lord, come and deal with the attitudes of my heart. Before I try to get other people sorted out, situations solved, I invite you to fill my heart. I may lack the strength to do this, so Jesus, you are my substitute. I receive your grace. I receive your cleansing. I receive your forgiveness for this right now."

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Lord, there are individuals here right now who say, "I have never trusted in Jesus Christ, and when I hear now what God requires of me, I see that I will never be able to stand on the Day of Judgment. But I'm hearing that Jesus has paid it for me." I pray that that individual would trust in Jesus Christ. I pray, Lord, that your grace would fill their hearts and cleansing would abound, and that they would be filled with your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.