

Matthew 5.21-26  
Generational Sins  
WRCOB 6.9.24

When I served in Nigeria  
I had the occasion to have dinner  
With a New Zealand Baptist couple  
At a Baptist Guest House.

We were being served by a stately southern belle  
The guest house hostess  
Who hailed from South Carolina.

During our conversation  
The New Zealand couple stated  
Their daughter was looking for schools in the US.

They were advised to look for schools in the north  
And what did I think?

Before I could say a word  
The hostess, as she was refilling our glasses  
Remarked

“You know, we didn’t start the war!”

For a split second  
Neither the NZ couple nor I  
Understood what she was talking about.

What war? Oh! You mean that war!

She meant, of course, the Civil War!

160 years, and how many generations later?

She harbored resentment for northerners.

If looks could kill, I'd have been dead.

This is a prime example of what is called  
Generational sin, our subject matter for today.

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Our Scripture Reading is one of six antitheses  
Jesus uses to compare the OT Law  
To a new understanding of that law.

He begins each of his statements with

**You have heard that it was said . . .**  
**But I say to you . . .**

Following the description of a particular law  
Jesus then challenges his listeners  
To exceed the expectations in the original law.

What we hear in Jesus' interpretation  
Is the fulfillment of THE Law of Love

Richard B. Gardner  
In the Believers' Church Commentary  
Labels each juxtaposition like this.

1. 5:21-26 Love That Makes Peace
2. 5:27-30 Love That Honors Boundaries
3. 5:31-32 Love That Keeps Commitments
4. 5:33-37 Love That Speaks the Truth
5. 5:38-42 Love That Endures Evil
6. 5:43-48 Love That Includes All

Today we look at the first set of contrasting statements.

## **Matthew 5:21-22 NIV**

**<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But 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.**

Raca is an Aramaic term of contempt.

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The religious leaders of the day  
Were quite good at following the law.

If Scripture said, “Don’t!” They didn’t.

If Scripture said “Do!” They did.

However, the fault Jesus had with them  
Was, though, they followed the legality of the law  
They didn’t follow the spirit of the law.

They knew  
According to the Sixth Commandments  
They were not to kill.

The commandment didn’t state, however  
That they couldn’t go and hate someone  
If so compelled to do so.

Their interpretation was that the Divine Law  
Prohibited only the sinful act  
Not the sinful thought.

Jesus countered

**But I say to you!**

Hating someone is like committing murder in your heart.

Calling another a fool commits verbal murder.

Matthew Henry says

*“It is this anger and malice that is the smoke from that fire which is kindled in hell.”*

According to Jesus

We are held accountable  
For every vicious thought  
For every hateful comment  
For every scornful look.

According to Jesus

We’ve got to deal with our anger and hatred  
Or it’s going to deal with us.

Don’t wish ill-will on someone

Because it’s like picking up a burning ember  
And throwing it at the person.

Who’s getting burned?

And yet, this is what we do

When we hold onto every grudge and hurt.

Jesus invites and instructs us to consider

How to make peace with ourselves and others

**Matthew 5:23-24 NIV**

**23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,**

**24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.**

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There's a story about two brothers  
Who together ran a store.

One day the books didn't balance.

They were short exactly thirty dollars.

One accused the other of taking the money.

Things got ugly.

The dissolved their partnership  
Divided their store in half  
Built a wall between them  
And made two stores  
Where once there was only one.

They wouldn't talk to each other  
They wouldn't go to one another's home  
They wouldn't share Christmas, Easter,  
Or any holiday.

The accused brother died.

Years later  
A man came in to the remaining brother's store.

He gave the man thirty dollars.

He explained that years ago he'd stolen the money.

And filled with guilt

He returned to the store

To confess and seek forgiveness.

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**Do not let the sun go down on your anger**

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:26.

Love that makes for peace requires

A constant check on your anger management

For if you don't deal with your feelings of resentment

They can quickly fester into something worse.

Max Lucado writes,

*Resentment is when you let your hurt become hate.*

*When you allow what is eating you to eat you up. When you poke, stoke, feed, and fan the flame, stirring the flames and reliving the pain.*

*Resentment is the deliberate decision to nurse the offense until it becomes a black, furry, growling grudge.*

And if your hurt turns into hate

It can easily transmit to the next generation.

Like the ancestors of our southern belle

That passed their hatred of northerners

Down through the generations to her.

There is the potential to inherit parents' sins.

From the 10 Commandments

**Exodus 20:5**

**The iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the sons and daughters—unto the third and fourth generation.**

In other words

Unresolved issues, unintentionally or intentionally  
Are handed down from generation to generation.

The Southern Belle's hatred for Northerners

Hatred toward different ethnicities

Dysfunctional family patterns

All the phobias and 'isms

Can pass to the next generation.

It's not in the Southern Belle's DNA

Nor did she receive it through osmosis

She was taught to hate.

Whether it is sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class

Or as in the case of my story

Being from a certain region of the country.

This ancestral sin, inheritance of evil

Intergenerational hatred whatever you want to call it

If not dealt with

Will pass from one generation to the next.

That is the very reason

Jesus challenges his listeners

To leave their gift at the altar

Go and reconcile before offering it

Because we just might end up being responsible  
In passing our hatred onto our children.

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Love that makes for peace  
Learns to break the vicious cycles of hate.

The sins of the parents  
Don't have to pass to the next generation.

From the Book of Ezekiel

### **Ezekiel 18:20 CEB**

**<sup>20</sup> A child won't bear a parent's guilt, and a parent won't bear a child's guilt. Those who do right will be declared innocent, and the wicked will be declared guilty.**

We are not responsible for our parents' hatred.

Later generations won't be blamed  
UNLESS we take on their hatreds  
And make them our own.

Every generation is responsible  
To break the vicious cycle of hate.

It starts with understanding, empathy and a commitment  
To actively choose love and compassion  
Over fear and prejudice.

Sometimes parents don't take seriously  
How their hatreds and prejudices rub off on kids.

For instance, Philip Yancey tells the story  
Of a friend whose marriage fell on hard times.



*One night, George passed a breaking point and emotionally exploded. He pounded the table and floor. "I hate you!" he screamed at his wife. "I won't take it anymore! I've had enough! I won't go on! I won't let it happen! No! No! No!"*

Yancey writes that several months later

His friend woke up in the middle of the night.

He heard his two-year-old son talking in his sleep.

He got up, walked down the hallway

And listened in on his son.

The two-year-old with just the right inflection

Repeated word for word his father's words.

*I hate you ... I won't take it anymore ... No! No! No!*

His friend realized in a very tragic way

That he had just passed on his anger and hatred

To the next generation.

*Apart from forgiveness, the monstrous past may awake at any time from hibernation and devour the present--and even the future (Philip Yancey, "Holocaust & Ethnic Cleansing," in Christianity Today, August 16, 1993).*

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And so, my brothers and sisters

I encourage us to reflect on our own experiences

What steps can we take to prevent generational evil?

What generational sins have we experienced

And what can be done about it?

How does generational sin  
Manifest in contemporary society?

How is it associated with the phobia and 'isms of today?

Let us take to heart Jesus' teachings in this sermon.

We are not to kill.

Okay, plain and simple enough

But Jesus calls us one step further.

We'd better deal with our anger and resentments  
Before we unintentionally pass them  
On to the next generation.

Instead of passing on generational sins  
Let's pass on generational blessings  
To the following generations.

How about passing on the fruits of the Spirit?

*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,  
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

What about extending grace and mercy  
Instead, of judgment and wrath?

What about that?

Well, that's what this kingdom living is all about.