

Introduction:

What is acceptable behavior? **ACTIONS...WORDS...ATTITUDES...THOUGHTS...** Which level is the one where we cross the line? Let's look at them one at a time. Is it at the **ACTION** level? Meaning that if someone actually **DOES** something (harm somebody), then it is **NOT** ok. **Is that the line where acceptable behavior crosses the line?**

Or it is at the **WORDS** level? Meaning that if someone starts calling another person names, calling down curses, **is that the line where acceptable behavior crosses the line?** **ACTIONS** and **WORDS** tend to live in the **OUTERWORLD**. This is **the place where most behavior is seen**. Depending on the person and circumstance, it usually takes a fair amount of pushing before someone does some form of **ACTION** or uses **WORDS** to hurt another person.

But what about all that stuff that happens in the **UNDERWORLD**? For instance, **ATTITUDE**. **Is it acceptable behavior to entertain a certain ATTITUDE toward someone?** That could be **anger, bitterness, grievance, spite** or something of the like. In this light, **the only difference between WORDS and ATTITUDE is that one is spoken externally and the other is spoken internally in the UNDERWORLD**. **Is this the line of acceptable behavior?**

But the fundamental element behind **ACTIONS, WORDS and ATTITUDES** is **THOUGHTS**. **THOUGHTS** initially can be benign or neutral. While we can't help all the **THOUGHTS** that come into our head, we can control whether we choose to **FOCUS** on them. **We become what we meditate on whether that be positive or negative thoughts**. **Is THOUGHT then where acceptable behavior crosses the line?**

The reality is that most of us would be embarrassed to display your honest **THOUGHTS** and their corresponding **ATTITUDES** on a projection screen. **Because these discussions remain in the UNDERWORLD, most of us consider them neutral discussions.**

Jesus though doesn't see things this way. While the world says it is NOT ok to express yourselves in your OUTERWORLD, Jesus says I want you to go deeper and manage your UNDERWORLD. The world says that harmful ACTIONS and WORDS cross the line. Jesus says in our text that harmful THOUGHTS and ATTITUDES cross the line. The world says that ACTIONS and WORDS may get you in trouble with the law. Jesus shockingly says that harmful THOUGHTS and ATTITUDES can put you in hell.

The genius here is that if we learn to manage our UNDERWORLD, we will be able to manage our OUTERWORLD.

Preview:

1. Look at the different lines between of acceptable behavior between the religious leaders and Jesus.
2. How are we supposed to manage our **UNDERWORLD**.
3. Look at the dire consequences if we don't heed Jesus' words

In the end I want us to see that **IF WE MANAGE OUR INNERWORLD, WE MANAGE OUR OUTERWORLD.**

Summary of the Sermon:

Thus far, in our journey down “the road less traveled” we have been confronted with issues Jesus states are crucial if we are to be one of His followers. In the Beatitudes, we see the need for **CHARACTER** in the Christian’s life. That character then **INFLUENCES/CALLING** those around us as salt preserves meat and as light pushes back the darkness.

But we quickly learn that nothing we do on this journey is meaningful in Jesus’ eyes unless we have right relationship with others. We learned last week that **GOD WANTS US TO PLEASE HIM BY LOVING OTHERS ACCORDING TO THE MORAL LAW. UNLESS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS CONNECTED TO LOVING OTHERS ACCORDING TO THE MORAL LAW, OUR FAITH IS MEANINGLESS.** I call this “relational righteousness”. It is **NOT** the righteousness that brings salvation. It is the righteousness that **shows** we are saved. It does **NOT** earn our way to God. It is our way to say thank you to Him by loving others the way the moral law calls us too.

This last point, the one concerning our connection to God through loving others, is particularly important to Jesus. In fact, it is so important that He lists **SIX INSTANCES** where the Pharisees and scribes had served God with a false sense of relational righteousness. Where they thought they were doing God favors and in reality, they were offending Him. Where they thought they were leading others to Him, only to learn they were dragging people farther away from God. Where they were making God apple pies, only to find out He likes cherry.

This morning we explore the first of six issues where Jesus demonstrates what **RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE HEART** really looks like. Behind these six illustrations are six abuses found in the people following God. Six attempts to soften God's Law to create their own form of righteousness that is void of any relationship. Each distortion of the text begins with the formula: "YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID..." to which Jesus replies, "BUT I TELL YOU..." Each correction by Jesus is worthy of our attention and that is why we will walk slowly through them one by one over these next six weeks. They cover a range of topics: from **ANGER** to **ADULTERY**. **DIVORCE** to **KEEPING OUR WORD**. **REVENGE** and **HOW WE ARE TREAT THOSE WE JUST DON'T LIKE**. As we look over His shoulder and watch how Jesus confronts the religious showman of His day.

The Text: Outline: (Pharisees distortion, Jesus' correction & 2 illustrations)

²¹*"YOU HAVE HEARD that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'*

²²*BUT I TELL YOU that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

²³*"THEREFORE, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

²⁵*"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

Matthew 5:21-26

Distortion of the Text:

²¹*“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’*

Mt 5:21

#1: Reduced the command by adding to it:

At first glance, our commandment appears a simple recitation of the 6th commandment, “Do not murder.” This commandment in and of itself brings up a plethora of issues (war, abortion, euthanasia, suicide, infanticide, capital punishment).

But it is this second portion of our text, the addition that draws our attention this morning, “**Anyone who murders will be subject to judgment**”. This portion comes from the book of Numbers (Nu 35:30,31) where it describes civil authorities response to someone who commits a murder. So what is wrong with **JUXTAPOSITIONING** these two verses together? What is so wrong with stringing together a few verse which appear to have similar themes? By combining this response to the 6th commandment, the Pharisees and scribes were **WEAKENING** the commandment (**HOW?**) by limiting to **ONLY THOSE WHO ACTUALLY COMMIT THE ACT OF MURDER.** **ONLY THOSE** who pick up the knife, the gun, the bomb only these people are the ones who are guilty of violating this commandment. But us good church folks, we don’t have to worry about that. We’re to goody too shoes. As long as we did not actually commit murder, all is well, and we can face the commandment with peace knowing I have kept the law of God and must therefore be righteous or have a meaningful relationship with Him.

As we will soon see, Jesus doesn't limit the 6th commandment like the Pharisees and scribes. In fact, Jesus **EXPANDS THE COMMAND** to many settings from back alleys brawls to **DOMESTIC ARGUMENTS**, from suicide bombings to **CONFLICT BETWEEN ROOMMATES**, from gang turf battles to **OUR ATTITUDE TO OUR BOSS**, from injury to **INSULT**. Jesus makes murder an issue of the **HEART** rather than an issue of the **HAND**. Jesus is concerned about managing our **UNDERWORLD**.

#2: Relocated the venue from HEAVEN to EARTH:

The second thing the Pharisees and scribes did was to limit the sanctions and prohibitions **TO AN EARTHLY COURT RATHER THAN A HEAVENLY ONE**. "Anyone who murders will be subject to judgment". Judgment here means a "local court." The Pharisees and scribes want to place murders at the hand of civil human magistrates and authorities. **They want to a setting they can influence**. In legal terms, this is called a **"CHANGE OF VENUE"**. Lawyers attempt to move a case because to another location where they believe they can get a result, a verdict, a sentencing more to their liking. **You must not murder for if you do, the local authorities will certainly hunt you down and impart justice**. Notice, there is no mention by the religious teachers of **THE JUDGMENT OF GOD** anywhere in this text.

Jesus wants to bring before the **judgment throne of God**.

*But I tell you that anyone who is **angry** with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Matthew 5:22

Since human justice cannot try **"anger"** with any certainly and the fact that Jesus mentions **"the fires of hell"**, it is inferred that Jesus is talking about a heavenly

judge. Jesus takes us to a Judge who is always impartial and fair. Jesus believes in the ultimate justice will occur in heaven.

*One thought on this...Religious people do not think about eternity, about judgment day, about standing before Jesus. **Religious people are concerned with the FEAR OF MAN, not the FEAR OF THE LORD.** They are concerned with how events will fare in this life. The idea, that every action, every idle word, every attitude and every thought will be laid bare in Heaven is something they choose not to focus on. How will we fare? I understand this as a leader. My main motivation on the difficult decisions that come my way is not whether people will like me, or whether it will make me successful, but what will God think about this decision come Judgment Day. Dear church, where is “the fear of the Lord” today? Without it, Christianity like the Pharisees and scribes is just games.*

#3: Kept only the negative side of the command (MOST IMPORTANT**):**

They Pharisees and teachers of the law only saw **THE LAW IN ONE-DIMENSION NOT TWO.** They said, “I have not killed thus I am not guilty.” But they refused to see that **EVERY MORAL LAW STATED IN A NEGATIVE MANNER HAS A POSITIVE INFERENCE.** Since we are not to murder we are to value all human life. Life is precious because God’s DNA is imprinted on everyone. This means life in the womb, life of the elderly, the poor, the homeless, the immigrant and alien, other religious faiths, and for some of us that even means Democrats.

Besides the a child in the womb, to be Prolife according to the 6th commandment means:

1. Handicapped (Mentally or Physically)
2. Civil Rights
3. Homeless
4. Aliens and strangers

5. Apartheid
6. Prostitution
7. Pornography degrades the *Imago Dei*
8. Violence
9. Orphans and Widows
10. Human Trafficking

It is possible for us to face the Law of God as we find it in the Bible, but to interpret and define it, and to make it something that we can keep very easily because we only keep it negatively. The religious leaders had reduced and confined the law so much that it is no longer the law of God. (Rich young ruler)

There once was a man, a “righteous” man who came to Jesus:

¹⁶ Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” ¹⁷ “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” ¹⁸ “Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied, ““Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” ²⁰ “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” ²¹ Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

The rich young ruler thought he had a meaningful relationship with God because he kept the letter of the law. Yet, in spite of his strict adherence to the law, in spite of his attempts to meet each requirement of the law, in spite of all his attempts and efforts, he missed God because he followed the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. He went through the religious motions without every finding a meaningful relationship with God. He did all the right motions, but missed the heart of God. In the same way, you and I can accept the letter of the law and forget the whole spirit and persuade ourselves that we are at perfect peace with God.

Correction by Jesus:

According to Jesus, the way to key to controlling our **OUTERWORLD** is to manage our **INNERWORLD**. In order to manage that **INNERWORLD**, He first elevates the seriousness of **INNERWORLD** offenses.

*²² But I tell you that anyone who is **angry** with his brother (**without a cause**) will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother (or insults them), ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Mt 5:22

#1: Removing the cause: Heart murder or **ANGER** - Managing Attitudes

Qualifier “without a cause”. Most early reliable texts do not have this. It may have been inserted by later scribes to take into account those incidences where anger is appropriate, where anger is the natural response to unrighteousness. For instance, any time we discuss abuse, injustice, human trafficking, people that take advantage of others or forces that impede the advancement of God’s love and grace, it is natural and right that anger surface. **However, anger ALWAYS has a line. When it is crossed, we grow ugly. Bitterness enters into us. The monster within.**

Jesus goes on to explain in verse 22 that this commandment on murder not only includes actual physical act of murder, **BUT ALSO INCLUDES ANY EMOTIONS OF THE HEART WHICH PRECEDE THE ACT**. This is called “heart murder”. Thus, the true way to understand, “Do not murder” is “**Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.**” To those Pharisees and scribes who say you are only in danger of judgment if you murder someone, Jesus comes along and says that if you are angry in your heart toward someone, you are guilty of murder. To feel enmity in our heart toward our brother or sister according to Jesus, in the sight of

God, is murder. To which the Apostle John reminds us once again of God's perspective on anger, "*Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him*" (1Jn 3:15).

#2: Removing the cause: INSULT or damaging words

JESUS THEN EQUATES "INSULT" TO MURDER. Anger often translates into words. A Chinese proverb states: "*The fastest horse can not catch a word spoken in anger.*" Not only are we to starve or stem causeless anger, **WE MUST NEVER BE GUILTY OF "EXPRESSIONS" OR "WORDS" OF CONTEMPT.**

One of the lies I was told as a child was this: "*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.*" Words shape and chisel away at us. That can be both positive as well as negative. **MOST PEOPLE LIVE UNDER THE CRIPPLING EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE WORDS.** "*You fool.*" "*You are worthless.*" "*You idiot.*" "*You will never amount to anything.*" "*Why can't you be like...*" "*I am tired of you...why don't you...*" All curses that intend to cause injury which Jesus is the same as murder. "Raca" means "*worthless fellow*", "*fool*" "*nitwit*", "*blockhead*", "*numskull*" or "*stupid*". Raca is insult to a person's intelligence. More his character.

In most instances, these events will **NEVER** lead to the ultimate act of murder, yet in God's sight they are tantamount to murder. Jesus extends both the nature of the crime (from murder to motive) as well as the penalty (human court to hell).

Reconciling with each other (Fix the breach NOW):

To avoid this devastating dilemma, Jesus gives one remedy. It is stated in the closing two parables of our text. Two illustrations. One message. One is taken from church, the other from the law court. One concerns our brother, the other our enemy. But in both cases the basis situation is the same (**somebody has a grievance against us**) and the basic lesson is the same.

²³ *“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

²⁵ *“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

Mt 5:21-26

First, let's comment on the **URGENCY**. This is what Jesus states in His closing stories. (the necessity for immediate, **URGENT** action). In the very act of worship, if we remember we have a grievance, we are to break off worship and go and put the relationship back on proper footing. In the very act of going to court, on our way there, we are to settle our debt before the gavel comes down and we find out that the time of reconciling is past.

Yet how seldom do we heed Christ's call for immediacy of action! Rather than follow the words of Jesus, we downplay our scenario. We say, *“Its not that bad.” “It's only an attitude, an emotion, a feeling.” “I haven't done anything with it.”*

Yet, we fool ourselves in thinking, my worship is acceptable. My gifts will be received. My acts of service, they are pure. Listen to this text. Jesus sends you out of His house, away from His presence and back into the market place,

the office, the home, to make relationships right. God would rather have a quartet of pure worships than a thousand voice choir of people with tainted hearts.

We need to be more sensitive about these evils. We must never allow an estrangement to remain, still less to grow. We must not delay to put it right. Or Paul says, *“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”* (Ep 4:26). We must reconcile the relationship, pay the debt, make amends. **If we want to avoid committing murder in God’s sight, we must take every possible positive step to live in peace and love with all men. WE MUST MANAGE OUR UNDERWORLD.**

We need to be prompt in our response, because you are not promised tomorrow’s opportunity, only today’s. Make the effort today. Don’t put off today, what you must do now even if that means leaving church to do it.

Not only are we not to harbor murder and evil thoughts in our heart against one another; but the commandment to kill really **MEANS WE SHOULD TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TO MAKE AMENDS WITH OUR BROTHER.** We need to fix the breach now.

Why the urgency?:

Why the urgency? What the need for immediate response? Jesus states one reasons: **BECAUSE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OUR ACCESS TO HIM, IS DIRECTLY TIED TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS (2X).** The Psalmist says, *“If I had cherished sin in my heart (if I harbor anger, if I keep a grudge), the Lord would not have listened”* (Ps 66:18). If we do not examine our heart and ensure that the relationships of this life are pure and have not birthed hatred, we may miss God entirely. Your relationship with Him is estranged. You think you are close, but you

are really distant. You cannot say, I love God and then hate your brother in your heart. He would rather you stay home than come to His house and play church.

Why? **BECAUSE THAT ONE THAT YOU DESPISE IS THE VERY AFFECTION OF GOD.** Though they may deserve every emotion, every evil thought, every inclination for revenge, God says “Show them My grace.” Our struggle is but a mere reflection of the merciful heart of our God. He takes this very seriously. **DO IT NOW, BECAUSE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD CANNOT MOVE FORWARD YOU DEAL WITH IT.**

But this is not all. Not only must we have true motives in our relationship with God in our heart, Jesus goes on to say that if you must fight, wrestle and push away all attitudes, emotions, feelings and thoughts of hatred (anger, bitterness, strife, scorn and abuse) **FOR IF WE CANNOT CONTROL OUR WORDS, JESUS SAYS WE WILL HAVE A NEW RESIDENCE IN THE FIRES OF HELL.**

Well, I am a Christian that won't apply to me. May I remind you that this sermon by Jesus is addressed to Christians, to those who claim to follow Jesus, to those who claim to be on the road less traveled. “Many will say to me on that day...”

Now hell is a difficult topic for all of us to ponder. Many people have told me, “My god would never send me to hell.” To which I respond, “Your god may not, but the God of the Bible will.” In fact, the God of the Bible does not send people to hell. People ask to go there. In the book of Romans, Paul writes that “God gave them over to their urges and desires” (Rom. 1:24). They insisted on living a certain way so God pulled away and said, “*Fine, if that is what you want, you can have a life without My presence, My Promises, My Power or My people.*” Yes, hell is a

literal place according to the Bible, but in reality is simply the absence of God. ***“If you insist of living without God in this world, to live according to your own rules and way, then he says, I will grant you an eternity of such living.”***

CHOOSE

the road less traveled
studies in the sermon on the mount



ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR?

- action
- words
- attitudes
- thoughts

ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR?

- action

- not ok

- words

- attitudes

- thoughts

- ok

ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR?

- action
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not ok

-
- attitudes
 - thoughts

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CONCEPT ABLE BEHAVIOR?

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ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR?

- action
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ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR?

- action
- words
- attitudes
- thoughts

it's all
not ok



MANAGING YOUR

UNDERWORLD



condition
(beatitudes)

influence / calling
(salt and light)

relational righteousness
(moral law)

behavior
(attitudes)

“YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID.”

“FEEL YOUR...”



REPLICATED THE COMMAND BY ADMINING TO IT.



TEXT DISTORTION

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’

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Exod. 20:13

Num. 35:30-31

RELOCATED THE MEMBER FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH



TEXT DISTORTION

21“You have heard that it was
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KEPT ONLY THE
NEGATIVE SIDE
OF THE LAW

3



PRO-LIFE

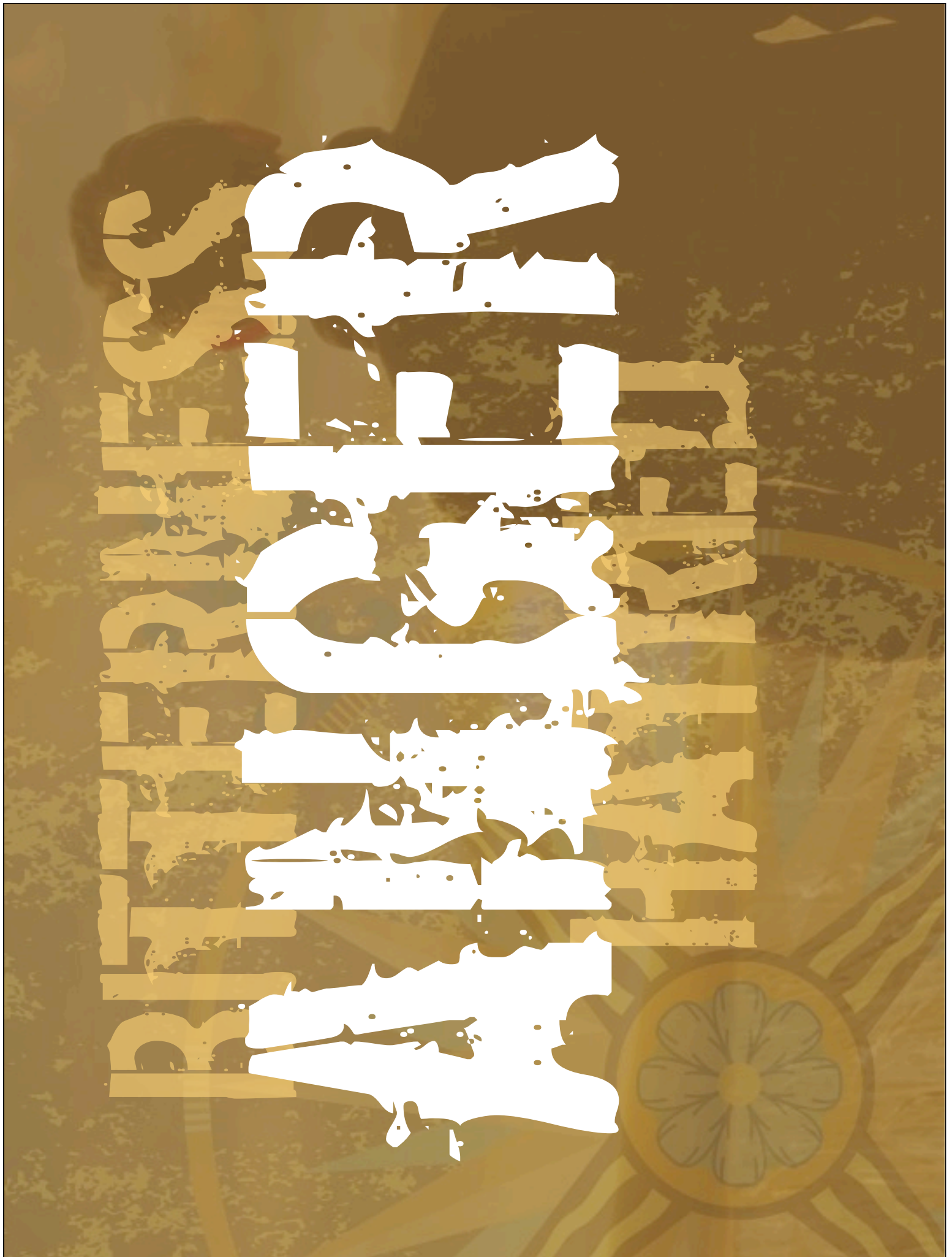
(Honoring the *Imago Dei* in each person)

1. Handicapped (Mentally or Physically)
2. Civil Rights
3. Homeless
4. Aliens and strangers
5. Apartheid
6. Prostitution
7. Pornography
8. Violence
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10. Human Trafficking

BUT I TELL YOU...

that that anyone who is angry with his brother (without a cause) will be subject to judgment.

Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, '**You fool!**' will be in danger of the fire of hell.



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MANAGING YOUR

UNDEERWORLD



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MANAGING YOUR

UNDERWORLD



ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR?

- action
- words
- attitudes
- thoughts

it's all
not ok



CHOOSE

the road less traveled
studies in the sermon on the mount

