

I don't watch a lot of TV which is probably why I pay as much attention to the commercials as the programs. There's a novelty to them for me. Have you seen the one where the woman is talking to an accountant and he says he'll get her taxes to 'an ok place'. The spot is for the same company that features a couple in a hospital where the man is awaiting surgery. The woman sitting by his side asks the nurse, "have you worked with this doctor". The nurse replies something to the effect of, "yes, he's ok". The tag line is *just ok is not ok*. You see, 'ok' stops short of reaching its full potential.

If Jesus were here today, I sense he'd say that the law in his time was 'okay' meaning that it stops short and his followers must do more. He quotes the law and then broadens its application, specifically with regard to our communal interactions. (*Just ok is not ok*).

You see, for Jesus, it's not about you. Instead, it's about you in relationship. Emmanuel means God with us, not God with me or you or her or them (in the singular). We experience God in community. Jesus is giving us the ethics for right relationship.

That means that as individuals, we don't just stop short at whatever benefits 'me', but we go the distance to what's right for 'all of us'. How are you interfacing with others, whether it's your spouse, parent, child, friend, coffee barista, or supermarket bagger. Are you doing 'ok'...or better than that? Are you stopping short or are you all-in?

I'll spend just a few minutes talking about a few of Christ's examples as they pertain to how we interact with others. Then, I'll give you some food for thought about how to apply this idea more broadly.

Jesus says 'you've heard it said that you shouldn't murder, but I say to you, 'if you are angry with a brother or sister', you are answerable for it. He's getting to the feelings behind the actions or the 'why behind the what'.

Jesus understands that you don't just get to a particular event without something leading up to it. You may be able to say that you've lived by the law because you haven't murdered someone, but have you ever stabbed someone in the back...thrown someone under the bus...walked all over someone...or been instrumental in killing someone's dreams? (Uh-oh... right?)

And here's another 'uh-oh'... Name calling, putdowns, and those other eye-roll moments will get you into trouble. Who would have guessed that calling someone a fool could damn you to hellfire? Jesus uses a word here (and by the way, it's the only time it's used in the entire Bible): *raca*. It means empty headed or worthless. The new Oxford Bible says *raca* is "an obscure term of abuse". Anyone who calls another this is answerable to God. Again, if you didn't call someone a fool today, maybe you're in the clear... Or, maybe not. You've heard it said you shouldn't call someone a fool, but I say to you, you must see the other person's inherent worth and dignity.

Have you ever been angry with a brother or sister and not resolved it? Jesus says when you've got an issue with someone, work it out amongst yourselves. Even if you're on the way to court. You still have time before the judgement comes. Come to terms, an agreement, an understanding. That requires interaction; conversation because it's not about you. It's about you in community. If you don't work it out for yourselves, the court will work it out for you, but the resolution may not be what you want.

What Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms is that if we can't get it right with each other, we can't get close to God. In verses 23 and 24, he says that if you've got an issue with another, go get reconciled before you can take approach the altar of God.

And did you hear what it says? Not, if you are mad at someone else, go tell them, then you can approach the

altar, but if you remember that someone is mad at YOU, you have to go make nice with them before you can get together with God. It's not just the responsibility of the person who is angry to stop feeling that way, but also the responsibility of the person who is the recipient (and possibly the cause) of that anger. It's not about just you, but you in relationship.

According to HealthyPsych.com, anger is a secondary emotion. It is fueled by fear or sadness. While in the very short term, there are some benefits to anger, such as triggering the fight or flight response, the truth is that anger isn't good for us. Not only can it make us bitter, resentful, and stand-offish, but it can lead to physical problems. Anger can raise our blood pressure, cause our jaws to clench, give us stomach pain, keep us from sleeping, make us depressed, cause skin problems and even cause heart attack and stroke.

Do you think that the God that created us wants us to live like that? Could it be that part of the reason we're supposed to live in right relationship is because it's healthier for all of us?

As I think about the Jesus' audience that day so long ago, I wonder if the people listening to him were squirming just a little. Jesus was saying that they had to think more broadly and even possibly move beyond their comfort zones. All of a sudden, all those things they'd been doing weren't enough.

For example, you've heard it said that you should recycle, but I say to you unless you're also composting, buying second-hand items, and encouraging businesses to observe green practices, then you're just doing ok, but you could be doing so much more.

Christopher Burkett, a British minister, is much more eloquent than I, so I'll share some of his wisdom.

You have heard it was said *You can't teach an old dog new tricks...* But I say to you the tree grows until its dying day, living is learning, experience and the new knocking on each other, making discipleship true. For if you know only yesterday's answer, where will you meet the risen Christ anew?

You have heard it was said *A friend in need is a friend indeed...* but I say to you an ally anticipates, knows before the alarm the urge to empathy, the need to act and intervene for the good. For if you wait for the call—hesitant, reserved—can the name 'friend' be a true title to you?

You have heard it was said *If it ain't broke, don't fix it, ...* But I say to you a better way there may be sight isn't vision, what's comfortable can be a sham, how things are excludes too much. For if you let what is, be all where do you see the Kingdom's changing call? (<https://www.preacherrhetorica.com/epiphany-6-3-bf-lent.html> Christopher Burkett)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his audience that he didn't come to do away with the law, but to fulfil it—to make it complete. We already know the what (the law) and now Jesus encourages us to see the why (we do this because it's good for our relationships and our souls.) We move from 'just ok' to off the charts. It's the difference between shoveling a path to our own doorway and shoveling the sidewalk in front of your house and the neighbor's house, too.

You've heard it said that there are certain ways we should behave as Christians, but I say to you that until you do those things because Jesus asked you to, then you are just going through the motions. You're doing okay, but I say to you that you have so much more potential. Divine grace changes people and the world.

Christianity isn't just ok. It's awakening, exhilarating, freeing, accepting, healing, transformative... And it's lived in community. You've heard it said that you should treat others the way that you would want to be treated, but I say to you, don't stop short. Your brother or sister may be experiencing something that you cannot even fathom...and you may be in a position to use your skill or knowledge or privilege to help them. Be fully invested. Christianity isn't just ok. It is life changing! Blessed be and amen.