

My sermon on the sixth commandment created a few questions in your minds that you sent my way. Here they are and some brief thoughts on each.

The first question you sent in was, “How can we stop black churches from being burned... What should we do?”

This question references a comment I made about our nation’s racism problem and how it’s playing out in the burning of black churches. Over a recent two week period in St. Louis, seven churches were victims of arson. Of the seven, six were all black congregations. So how can we stop this? What should we do?

First, we can pray. We can pray for protection of our African American brothers and sisters. We can pray against racism and the acts it causes people to do in our nation. You can pray.

Second, we can speak out on behalf of our African American brothers and sisters. When an African American church was targeted by a gunman in Charleston, SC earlier this year, pastor Ray Ortlund had a shirt made that he wore the next week as he preached. He posted the shirt on social media so people would know about it. On the front of the shirt, in huge font, were the words, “Shoot me too.” On the back was, “#Charleston.” You can show boldness as you stand with your brothers and sisters who are being targeted.

Third, we can befriend them. Did you know that there’s an African American church in Cross Lanes? Do you know anyone who attends there? Yes, there’s a different culture in an African American church than what you’re probably used to. Yes, you’ll be faced to wrestle with some of your own prejudices (that you don’t even know you have!). Yes, you may be viewed with suspicion as Sunday is still the most segregated day of the week in our country. But most importantly, yes, God will be glorified as you seek to make an effort to befriend your brothers and sisters in Christ who, because of their race, have experienced things you can’t relate to.

Finally, I don’t know if we can do anything to stop black churches from being burned. Unless you’re an arsonist, which you should stop being by the way, people will continue to break laws and burn churches because of the evil that’s in them. What you can do is pray, speak out on behalf of, and befriend African American Christians in our community, so they know they are loved and have fellow Christians who are for them and not against them.

The second question you texted in was, “If being irritated equals murder, how do you get better at not being so easily irritated? Heck, I get irritated at my sister daily.”

The goal of the Christian life isn’t to “get better” at anything. The goal of the Christian life is to fall more in love with Jesus. We get irritated when something or someone (like your

sister) doesn't live up to our expectations. Basically, we put ourselves in a position of ruler and judge and if they don't do what we say or expect we get irritated and angry with them.

However, if instead of trying to control others, our goal is to fall more in love with Jesus, we'd see other people (like your sister) from a different perspective. Because falling in love with Jesus means that His words influence how you live. And Jesus said things like, "Love other people." He also said, "I will always be with you." He also said, "I love all people."¹

So Jesus is with you. He's told you to love other people. AND He's told you that He loves all people.

So how should that affect your relationship with your sister? Does Jesus love her? Yes. Has He told you to love her? Yes. Is Jesus always with you, including when you're around your sister? Yes. So how do you think Jesus wants to show your sister His love for her when you're around her? By your actions, words, and attitude!

When you get irritated with your sister, something other than your love for Jesus is influencing you. And whatever that thing is, it's competing with your love for Jesus. Meaning, it's something that's trying to steal your love away from Christ.

The greatest way to fight all sin, including irritability, is to focus on Christ. His love for you. His presence with you. His joy, hope, pleasure, and power in you. His beauty. His grace. His mercy. His forgiveness. His life. His death. His punishment for your sins. And His promises to you.

When Christ is your focus—when Jesus is your joy—everything changes. And you see people (even your sister) not as someone who irritates you, but someone to love. Because Christ loves them. He wants you to love them. And being with you always, He wants you to be the means by which others (like your sister) experience His love for them.

Thanks for your questions. And keep them coming.

Pastor Josh

¹ These are paraphrases.