

**This is Not Good for My Rage**

James 1:19-20

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March 24, 2019

So Andrea and I were sailing a few weeks ago, and we had been on the water for a little while, and we finally came across this little island we were looking for. We had found a treasure map and once we got to this little island, we lowered the anchor and started trying to figure out where the treasure might be. We ended up digging holes in a bunch of places before finally we heard that satisfying clunk of our shovel hitting the box. We dug up this beat up looking chest, and put it on the boat. Then we got back on the island to get more supplies before we were to head out. But while we were on this island, another boat pulls up, and a guy hops onto our boat – takes the chest and leaves – I kid you not – a barrel of gunpowder on our boat. Once he's on his boat he detonates it and makes off with our chest. Our boat sinks, and Andrea and I are marooned there. Now it's not a big deal, because it was just a video game, but after that Andrea and I got really angry. Like out of proportion angry. We calmed down and kept playing – reminding ourselves that it's just a video game, no one was cheating, it's not real life. But we were both just so irritated from the game that we were really testy with each other after that. Even after we stopped playing, I found myself easily frustrated with small things at home. I had to keep reminding myself how silly it was that I was feeling so easily angered because of a 30 minute video game moment. It was ridiculous. As I wanted to snap at my family, I kept remembering the verse in Ephesians 4 that says "in your anger, do not sin". Anger is just such a wicked and dangerous thing.

I share that story for a couple of reasons. First is, I'm continuing Tom's series through the seven deadly sins, and today we are talking about anger. I would not refer to myself as an angry guy, or having a short temper, but I definitely get angry. And not just at big injustices, but tiny inconsequential things sometimes too. I think most people would say that many big things would make them angry, but if we are honest, small things do too. Sometimes we even just need a snack. And I struggle with it lots too. It's just so easy to get angry. Now some people would consider being angry to be yelling, or breaking things, but anger can be far more subtle and looks different to different people. Some would say "oh I'm not angry" – then stab you in the back! Everyone gets angry. The dictionary defines it as a strong feeling of displeasure, annoyance, or hostility. Then of course it manifests is different for everyone.

Isn't it funny how we always think we are right? Everyone always feels like our own views are balanced and make sense. Well, when I agreed to preach on anger, this is how I felt. I felt that I had a balanced, healthy view of anger. And as is often as we dig into God's word, the Spirit can show us new perspectives. And this was one of those times for me. It wasn't a huge shift, but a definite change of perspective. So this morning as we explore the topic, I just encourage you to keep an open mind, study the scriptures, and ask the Spirit to continue to shape you in this area.

Let's start off with the first question I asked. **If anger is not a sin, why is it listed as one of the 7 deadly sins?** You see, we know that anger is not a sin because God himself gets angry. Psalm 7:11 says "God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day." Even Jesus gets angry. In Mark 3 we see Jesus about to heal a man's crippled hand, and they are using it as a test to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. Jesus asks them if it was "lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" When no one answered, he says that Jesus "looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" before he heals the man. Then in Ephesians 4:26 says be angry and do not sin. Paul's words show us that there is a difference between sin and anger. So anger is not a sin. So why is it one of the 7 deadly sins then?

Well I like the way Tom said it last week, that the 7 deadly sins are destructive root issues that lead someone to many different sins. So while anger is not a sin, it leads to sin very quickly.

**So what was my changing perspective?** I have viewed anger most of my adult life as something that we should have. I have felt that sometimes in some situations it is good for us to be angry and we should be angry, because it motivates us to make change. Now anger should not be disproportionate, but assuming that the anger is reasonable and is grounded in righteousness, then it should be good. The term righteous anger has been used a lot, and what that is trying to get at is that there are things that make God angry, and we should be angry at those same things. For instance, we should be angry, and it should make us mad when we see great injustice done. It should make us mad when we see someone hurting another child of God. It should make us mad when someone we love is being hurt.

And so I kind of viewed anger as something that was good as a tool; something for us to use to motivate us, as long as it was a righteous anger and helping us to relate to God. My

problem however, is that as I looked at God's word, I saw the opposite. The Bible says over and over that we are to rid ourselves of anger. It warns that if we stay in our anger it will lead us to Folly, destruction, and sin. And I see no special exceptions.

Here are some examples: James chapter 1 verses 19 and 20 says know this my beloved Brothers let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Proverbs 29:11 says a fool gives full vent to his Spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back. Ecclesiastes 7:9 says be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the heart of fools. Proverbs 14:29 says he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. Matthew 5:22 says 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 fire of hell. And even the passage in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 26 that says be angry and do not sin, is followed by some warnings in the following verses. The whole of it says "be angry and do not sin do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil." Then a few verses later in verse 31 it says let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Then Colossians we see the same thing verse chapter 3 verse 7 says in these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

So while I thought it was right to stay in my anger, I have not found a single place in Scripture that says that we should stay angry. Every verse I read that is instructive to us, tells us to get rid of anger. **Therefore, where I feel I'm at in my journey of learning about anger in my life as a follower of Christ, is that it is okay for me to get angry, acknowledge it, guard myself and my actions from sin, and then get rid of my anger quickly.** That is what I see the scriptures teaching on anger. Now when I first was grasping this, it conflicted with my current understanding of anger, and I didn't like it. But I want to apply my life to the scriptures and conform to the ways that God teaches because I trust the his way is better than my way. So let's unpack this a little bit more.

If it's not okay for us to stay angry, why do we get angry in the first place? Anger is a Godly emotion. God gets angry perfectly. Perhaps part of what it means to be created in the image of God is that we have some of the same attributes. I imagine once we are in heaven with the Lord and are perfected bodies, we will likely be angry at the same things

that makes God angry because we will learn the same perspective as he has. I was talking with the young adults about Anger on Thursday, and Emily pointed out how our anger can help us understand how God must feel against injustice.

Anger is like many emotions we feel in that when done well, they serve a purpose, but because we are human and struggle with sin, our emotions can quickly get out of hand, and lead us down a path we don't want to be on. Anger is part of our body's warning system. **Think of it like feeling pain.** If your hand touches a hot stove, our body feels pain which tells our brain that something is wrong. Our brain can then send the right signals to tell everybody to take her hand off the stove and we remove our hand. Without feeling any pain, we would not recognize something is wrong. In a similar way anger tells us that something is wrong.

**We get angry when something we love is being hurt.** Where anger can go bad is that sometimes we love the wrong things or love things in the wrong order. So when a child drops and brakes a favorite dish, and apparent loses their temper and yells and screams at them, in that moment the parent is loving the dish more than the child with their actions. When someone says something that hurts our ego and we lash out at them, we are loving our ego more than that person. When we were having an irritated day, and we are lashing out at people around us, we are not loving them, just loving our own comfort. So anger should alert us, in an ideal sense, that something we love is being hurt, and it should cause us to take pause and consider what it is that we are trying to defend. So inherently it's really something good, assuming we are loving the right things which is most of the time not the case.

Another question I asked myself was **can anger be used to help us accomplish justice or good things?** And I think honestly it has potential, probably in a fight or flight scenario where you have to maybe defend yourself, or immediately move to action perhaps. But aside from perhaps a few distinct scenarios, I think about all of the times I've been angry and all of the foolish choices that I've made in my anger... Timothy Keller said "no other emotion has led so much violence and literally so many dead bodies". When you act in anger, your brain is not thinking the way it should. Many scientific Studies have been done that show that when we are angry there are changes to our body as well. Our cardiovascular system changes, our hormonal response changes, and our brain actually works differently. So when you're angry, your blood pressure increases, your body gets ready for a fight, our ability to process complex information is reduced, which means that

we end up having a difficult time hearing or interpreting or understanding other people, and instead we become hyper focused or single focused. One study showed that elevated cortisol in your brain is released, which disrupts the creation of new memories and access to our short-term memory. Studies show that being angry often can lead to habitual behavior of being angry, aggressive, and depressed over time, and can even lead to great anxiety. Are there even a ton of other things that happen to our body, which should tell us that anger is not a state that we are created to stay in.

I've said before that when we experience anger it should be a red flag for us to recognize that we have stopped living for our purpose. The reason that God created us was to bring him glory. If we live for any other reason, there are lots of other things that will get in the way of us living a wrong purpose, and every time you hit an obstacle it creates a bit of anger and frustration.

So we want to feel anger in the same way that we want to feel pain. Without it we would probably be in trouble. But just like being in pain we don't want to remain in pain, but it triggers our body to help us get out of the situation that is causing the pain. In a similar way our anger should alert us and help us deal with the issue that is causing the anger. Sometimes that might be real Injustice in the world. Sometimes it might just be just our pride and our ego got bruised, alerting us to sin in our life. And sometimes we just need a snack, and we're hungry. This is why we never want to suppress our anger to not allow ourselves to get angry, or to shame ourselves for feeling anger. When we sweep anger under the rug and don't deal with it, it leads to bitterness. On the flip side, when we give full vent to our anger it leads to wrath. Instead it's important for us to acknowledge it, calm down and figure out what made us angry so we can deal with it and respond with wisdom.

Now if you're like me at this point I was asking **wait a minute what about when I'm feeling angry and I feel that I am honestly Justified to be angry in that moment? What about righteous anger? What about when somebody really hurts me? What about when somebody hurts my family? Am I not allowed to stay angry in those situations?** And I think the answer is no. Like I said we will get angry because something we love is hurt or in trouble, but just like any other situation we need to get rid of that anger and that will help us move forward wisely. Let's look at righteous anger. We are never told in Scripture that we need to be angry about anything. I was reading a book by Brent Hansen called Unoffendable and he talks about how Christians are often some of the most angry people because they feel so entitled to be angry because of their righteous anger. He argues that we should forfeit our right to be offended and our right to hold onto anger. He points out that this strikes that our very pride and forces us not only to think about humility, but to

actually be humble. He also points out that the problem with righteous anger directed at someone is pretty tricky. Because we feel that our anger is more righteous than another person's anger and it's because we are just so right. We always side with ourselves our arguments are always convincing to us. Proverbs 16:2 says you may believe you are doing right, but the Lord will judge your reasons. In the moment my anger always seems righteous. It always seems like an appropriate response to the situation. But I have to remember it is just an emotion and I can't always trust my emotions to Lead Me In wisdom. And I think at this point when we were thinking about righteous anger and social justice and making change and standing up for the oppressed, it is really important to identify that there is a difference between anger and action anger and Hate anger and dislike and anger and conviction. Anger is simply that emotional response. Some people feel like if you are not angry then you don't care, but that can't be further from the truth. You can care so deeply about something and take action on it without being angry. In fact Recent research at the University of British Columbia has shown that in a few get worked up about a Cause online, people are less likely to take action on. Being angry often leads us to take less action.

So when we actually separate the emotion of anger from taking action, it helps us to not cling to our feelings of our justified anger.

So when I actually feel justified in my anger, I have to remember but in those circumstances I want to proceed in wisdom and I want to proceed in a way that helps resolve the issue or fix the issue, and the Bible says acting in anger will lead me to foolishness. So I have to do away with the anger I have to get rid of the anger as quickly as I can. And remember, anger is normal natural and even healthy for us to experience **I'm not saying don't get angry and don't be angry I am saying don't stay angry.** There may be actual emergency situations where we might have to make quick decisions and our anger will motivate us to action immediately. But the Bible says that we should be slow to anger, meaning that we shouldn't let ourselves get quickly wrapped up about things. When your kids do something wrong and you want to yell at them remember it is not an emergency. Calm down and then parent well. When your boss at work says something that ticks you off, Don't Go full venting in their office or quietly gossiping around to your coworkers, calm down and remember that you work for the Lord not for men and proceed with wisdom. When someone disagrees with you about politics or religion or money or sex, don't fly off the handle and let your ego be so easily threatened that you insult them, calm down and love your neighbor.

**So what are we supposed to do about anger then if we're not actually supposed to be staying angry and we're supposed to be slow to anger, what can we do?**

The very first thing when you recognize that you're angry, is **just pause**. We have to stop so that we don't do something foolish in our anger. We have to assess what is going on.

Assessing your physical body is really important. Are you hungry? Stressed? Then we have to assess what is our goal in this moment. We need to shift our goal by asking ourselves the question, **how do I best bring glory to God in this situation?** Asking that question helps us understand what is it that I'm defending: is it my own ego or insecurities? What is my perspective? Are my priorities disordered? Is my anger out of proportion to the situation? Am I angry at the right things?

One important thing that I've learned in the last handful of years is the importance of the story that we tell ourselves. We often get information from a situation and we make all kinds of assumptions about what the other people are meaning behind their words. How many times have you misspoke and said something that was taken the wrong way? Maybe it's just me but I can't even count how many times I have made somebody upset by something I've said and it was an honest misunderstanding because I was unclear. In relationship we have to seek understanding and try to understand more about the story. In our anger we believe the first story that we tell ourselves and it's often that the other person is just a big jerk a note to make my life miserable.

The other day I was driving with my family in the van, and it was when the roads were really wet and there was lots of mud on the windows. And I signaled to go into the other lane and did a shoulder check and I saw that I had lots of space between myself and the vehicle behind me, and as I started to move into the other lane I hear a honk, and I look again and there's actually a little black car driving in the lane that I cut off. I felt terrible. It'll be really frightening when car is almost hit you and you have to react. And it was totally my fault. Even though I signaled in shoulder checked I hadn't cleaned my back windshield and couldn't see him through the dirt. I don't know what went through this car is mind but I'm pretty sure they felt like I was the biggest idiot on the planet. And I think that because they immediately swerved into the left lane and raced beside me as a hand popped out the window waving a finger, and they were shaking their pointer finger at me. They then proceeded to go just in front of me and swerved the car in a quick jerk into my lane, I supposed to teach me what it feels like to be cut off in traffic, because apparently they thought I didn't know. And then they raced off. Now that person told themselves a story about that situation. And then they acted in anger trying to teach me a lesson. So it's important enter anger to not make great assumptions about other people. And it's also important to not just seek vengeance or Revenge. When somebody does actually hurt us or someone we love, the Bible is very clear that we need to love our

enemies. You may not call that person your enemy ever but we can learn even those who persecute us we should be forgiving towards. We have to trust that God will be the one to execute Justice and vengeance. It is not for us to do. And as I stand up here this morning and say all of this, I absolutely understand that this is just not like a light switch, and we can turn off for anger. It's hard and situations are complicated. But the warning against anger and scripture seems very clear and I will lead us to Folly if we stay angry.

The Bible also gives us some idea of what to do with anger.

We must be slow to anger and deal with it as soon as possible. Proverbs 14:29 says "Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly." Ephesians 4:26 says do not let the sun go down on your anger. This has nothing to do with the hour of the day, but rather to get rid of it quickly. Every situation is different. When you stub your toe, is different than an argument with your spouse. A harsh word from a friend or co-worker, is so much different than suffering abuse or loss of a loved one. But we need to be intentional at getting rid of our anger quickly.

The bible also reminds us that we have to love others. Matthew 5:44 says "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". 1 Peter 4:8 says "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins". Proverbs 15:1 says "a gentle answer turns away wrath", So when people make us angry, we must be gentle with them, be patient with them, and love them. Replacing our anger with gentleness and peace.

There are many more scriptures we can read, and none of this is really possible without the power of the Holy Spirit. So I suppose I'll leave us with this challenge – After service today, as you invite one another for lunch or go home with your families- talk about it. Talk about what your journey with anger has been like. Read the scriptures together. Maybe you are like me when I first was reading about this and you have a different perspective. So consider what the scriptures teach and how you might apply your life to it. Anger is not going anywhere. We will be angry a lot more times. But I think we would all agree that we want to live and act in wisdom, more than we want to be ruled by our rage, and by the Spirit's power and much of God's grace, we will continue to be better and better at moving from anger to gentleness.