

“Be Careful with Your Anger”
(James 1:20)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. James reminded us that when we are tempted, we must not blame God.
 - a. Temptations are often a part of trials, and trials are ordained by God.
 - b. But God is not the source of the temptation or the evil.
 - (i) Evil came from the creature.
 - (ii) It was ordained by God, but so that He might bring good from it.
 - (iii) And that is exactly how He uses it.
 - c. James reminds us that everything good comes from God.
 - (i) He is good and can't be tempted by evil.
 - (ii) He is holy and can't tempt others to do evil.
 - (iii) And being good/holy, all He does is good:
 - (a) Every good thing we have comes from Him.
 - (b) Especially our salvation and adoption into His family.
 - (c) The Lord even uses evil for good in our lives:
 - (1) By trying and stretching our faith.
 - (2) So that we will grow stronger.
2. Where does temptation come from?
 - a. James says, not from God, but from the devil, the world, and the flesh.
 - (i) Satan is where it originated.
 - (ii) He is largely in control of the world, which means there's plenty there to tempt us.
 - (iii) And we still have something like his own nature in us – called the flesh – that makes us liable to temptation.
 - b. When something that is to our evil taste is offered to us by Satan through the world, it incites our lust, which gives birth to sin and death.
 - (i) Our affection for that evil – our sin – is aroused: this is called lust.
 - (ii) Our lust reaches out and tries to take hold of it.
 - (iii) If it succeeds, we enter into temptation: this grip is so difficult to break.
 - (iv) If we can't break it, we'll sin.
 - (v) And when we sin, that deserves death.
 - c. Thankfully, the Lord gave His Son to die in our place and remove our guilt; but that doesn't excuse our sin – it gives us a stronger motivation to overcome it.
 - (i) We need to keep from entering into sin.
 - (ii) This means keeping away from the things that tempt us.
 - (iii) And we must increase in grace and subdue our sins.
 - (iv) God has given us the means: we must use them.

B. Preview.

1. Having dealt with more general principles regarding the trials we face everyday, James narrows his focus a bit:
 - a. He begins by narrowing it to an improper emotional response to our trials: anger (which we'll look at this morning and this evening).
 - b. Then he generalizes it a bit more to include every evil response we might have to trials (which we'll look at next Lord's Day).

2. This morning, James deals with the subject of anger, and here he tells us:
 - a. First, why we should manage our anger.
 - b. And second, how to manage our anger.
 - c. Since knowing why we should manage it will help us pay closer attention to how we should manage it, we'll deal with the *why* to manage it this morning, and then consider how to manage it this evening.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, why should we manage our anger? James writes, "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (v. 20).
 1. To help us understand what this means, we first need to define anger.
 - a. Biblical definition:
 - (i) Friberg's Lexicon defines the particular word we're dealing with (orge) "as a vigorous upsurge of one's nature against someone or something, *anger, wrath, indignation.*"
 - (ii) This word is most often used in Scripture to refer to God's wrath.
 - (a) "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'" (Matt. 3:7), that is, "*God's wrath/anger.*"
 - (b) It's also used of Christ, "After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored" (Mark 3:5).
 - (c) Since it refers simply to a strong opposition of one's nature against someone or something, it isn't sinful in and of itself. If it was, then God and Jesus Christ would be guilty of sin, which is impossible.
 - (d) Since God's nature is pure and infinitely holy, when it is stirred up vigorously against something, it is a holy and pure wrath.
 - b. However, when this strong opposition rises from a human nature polluted with sin, it can and does include sin (at least some measure as in everything else, but in this case, potentially much more):
 - (i) That's why James warns us against it here: "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).
 - (ii) That's why when anger is defined in a human context, the definition often includes its sinful tendencies:
 - (a) Consider the definition given in Webster's Dictionary: "A strong passion or emotion of displeasure or antagonism, excited by a real or supposed injury or insult to one's self or others, or by the intent to do such injury."
 - (b) It goes on to say, "*Anger* is like . . . Resentment; wrath; rage; fury; passion; ire gall; cholera; indignation; displeasure; vexation; grudge . . . *Anger* is a feeling of keen displeasure (usually with a desire to punish) for what we regard

as wrong toward ourselves or others. It may be excessive or misplaced, but is not necessarily criminal. *Indignation* is a generous outburst of anger in view of things which are *indigna*, or unworthy to be done, involving what is mean, cruel, flagitious, etc., in character or conduct. *Resentment* is often a moody feeling, leading one to brood over his supposed personal wrongs with a deep and lasting anger. . . . *Wrath* and *ire* (the last poetical) express the feelings of one who is bitterly provoked. *Rage* is a vehement [burst] of anger; and *fury* is an excess of rage, amounting almost to madness. Warmth of constitution often gives rise to *anger*; a high sense of honor creates *indignation* at crime; a man of quick sensibilities is apt to cherish *resentment*; the *wrath* and *ire* of men are often connected with a haughty and vindictive spirit; *rage* and *fury* are distempers of the soul to be regarded only with abhorrence.”

2. While all anger isn't necessarily sinful (that is, except for Christian imperfection), we see that much of what we experience is: There are two questions we need to consider to determine whether it's righteous or not:
 - a. What provoked our anger?
 - (i) Was it something sinful: some wrong done to me, or to someone else, or directly against God? Here I *may* have the right to be angry.
 - (ii) Something I interpreted as sinful, but is not really sinful?
 - (a) We need to be careful in our judgments, for we can often be wrong (*e.g.*, story of woman estranged from her friend because of a supposed offense).
 - (b) If there is no real offense, we are not justified in our anger.
 - (iii) Or was I offended by something that was really good, something I shouldn't have been offended by?
 - (a) Did someone say something I didn't like, but was true and I needed to hear it?
 - (b) I cannot be justly angry at this for Scripture tells us the wounds of a friend are better than the kisses of an enemy (Prov. 27:6; Cf. Ps. 141:5).
 - (c) Was it something God said in His Word or did in His Providence?
 - (d) Everything He does is good and is meant to help me grow and mature (James 1:4).
 - b. Secondly, how has it affected me?
 - (i) Am I able to recognize the injustice to myself or the dishonor to God, desire those things to be righteously resolved, and maintain a biblical love towards those who did the wrong?
 - (ii) Or has it produced sinful anger, resentment towards my neighbor, jealousy, or the desire for revenge? Has it made me angry with God?
 - (iii) If our "righteous" anger causes us to break the great commandment, the commandment of love – to God or our neighbor – our anger is sinful, even if – in the case of an offense by man – what provoked it in the first place was truly sin.
 - (a) Obviously, we are never to be angry with God or hate Him.
 - (b) But neither are we to hate our neighbor: Scripture says that we are even to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44).
 - (c) Our enemies are presumably those who unjustly injure us in some way.
 - (d) Anger is never righteous when it produces ungodly fruit.

(e) Since anger is the “vigorous upsurge of one’s nature against someone or something” and since our nature is full of sin, we must be very careful when our spirits become agitated that it doesn’t stir up our sin.

3. It is any wonder that we are warned against it?

a. From the Scriptures:

- (i) “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:31).
- (ii) “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth” (Col. 3:8).
- (iii) “Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension” (1 Tim. 2:8).
- (iv) “An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression” (Prov. 29:22).
- (v) The Lord tells us we are even to avoid those who are controlled by anger, “Do not associate with a man *given* to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways and find a snare for yourself” (22:24-25).

b. The Puritans also had something to say about it.

- (i) “It is the great duty of all Christians to put off anger. It unfits for duty . . . A man cannot wrestle with God and wrangle with his neighbor at the same time. Short sins often cost us long and sad sorrows” (Philip Henry).
- (ii) “The angry man, like the two hot disciples who called fire from heaven, ordains himself the judge, and would have God turn his executioner” (Thomas Adams).
- (iii) “He that will be angry, and not sin, must not be angry but for sin” (John Trapp), in other words, only sin may make us angry: the sins of others, but also our own sin if we don’t respond to it righteously. But that anger is not to express itself in unrighteous fruits.
- (iv) But recognizing that not all anger is sinful, William Jenkyn wrote, “Anger should not be destroyed but sanctified.”
 - (a) If it is used righteously, it can be our ally.
 - (b) It gives us the additional energy we need to resolve what caused the anger in the first place.
 - (c) If we cannot be angry without sinning, then we must fight against that anger, as we would any sin, as Paul writes, “Be angry, and *yet do not sin*; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26).
 - (d) But even if we can manage it, we must not let it dwell in our hearts for very long, for the longer it’s there, the more likely we will be to grow bitter or resentful and to close our hearts to God’s truth, which is why Paul tells us the sun must not set on it.

c. This evening, we’ll consider how James tells us to manage our sin. But for now, let’s prepare our hearts to come to the Lord’s Table where He offers us the grace we need to help us overcome our sinful anger – and all our sins – and to put on righteousness. Amen.