

Anger #3 (July 26)

The Uselessness of Anger

INTRO: Well, today is our 3rd week in our series on anger. And to be honest with you if there ever were a topic I feel unqualified to speak on; its anger. If there's an area that I really need God's grace to change me it's here. See, I have a long history of failure when it comes to anger. I'm guilty of many kinds of sinful anger. Road rage, yelling, fighting, bullying, slander, fits of rage, cursing and other evil deeds that stem from a heart of anger. The Bible clearly diagnoses me when it says: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another (Titus 3:3). So although I'm up here teaching today, this doesn't mean I'm an expert or above you or that I've achieved complete victory in this area. I haven't. I'm a work in progress. I need what I'm preaching more than you know.

ILL: On that note, I remember hearing a well known Bible scholar (Thom Schreiner) talk about being a member at John Piper's church. Piper has been honest about his struggle with anger in public. But during the class, (Thom Schreiner.) made a comment that shocked the students. He was lecturing then he said something to the effect of, 'You know, I was a member at John Piper's church for a long time and he isn't the most godly person in that church. He's godly but he sins too. And I've seen him sin, and seek forgiveness many times in the church.' That comment stuck with me and it gives me hope today because too often I've failed when it comes to my anger. Maybe you've seen it or heard it in me. Though Jesus has saved and changed me, I don't think I'm the most godly person in this church. Especially when it comes to anger. So I preach today as one who needs the grace of Jesus as much as you. *I preach today as one who's experienced some change in this area but needs mercy to*

change more. I've come to see that I'm often oblivious to my sinful anger and I need someone to point it out to me. It's a blind spot. But I think even coming to see my sin is a mercy from God. I think He God convicts me of it and reveals it to me in order to deliver me and heal me from it. So, here's an invitation, if you see sinful anger in me, feel free to confront me about it. Me or any other leader or member, for that matter. If we're going to mature in this area we'll need God's grace and mercy working through His church community.

TRANS: Being a Christian doesn't mean we're perfect believers but we are repenting believers. Meaning we never stop repenting and believing the gospel b/c we never stop needing it. *A Christian is a saint, a sufferer and a sinner at the same time. We believe yes, yet we struggle with the impact of this broken world on us, we believe yes, yet we struggle with the reality of our new identity as saints and we believe yes, yet we struggle with the influence of sin in us.* Including the sin of anger. So keep this in mind, believer as we talk about "The Uselessness of Anger". Which is pretty much part 2, of last week's message entitled "The Usefulness of Anger". *Today we'll learn about the damaging and destructive side effects of anger.* And to do this we'll look at one passage, then a case study of anger from the start of human history.

TRANS: To begin this morning, please open to James 1:19-21. We're going to learn that: ****Our anger is useless to please God because we're sinful.****

And as we set our minds on the text lets **PRAY** for more grace.

The first thing we're going to see today is that:

1. Our anger must be put away because it leads to sinful actions

To start let's seek to understand this important text James 1:19-21 which says: "*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹*"

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

TEACH: So we come, to a pretty famous passage on anger. Many of us probably have some of these verses memorized. The Bible gets practical telling us to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. ***But what does that mean and how does that help when I'm angry?*** Well, I think I've misinterpreted these verses ever since I've been a Christian. And here's why, I've not understood the text in its context which I think leads me right to the helpful meaning and application of this verse. See the context is all about the Word of God. v.18 tells us that believers are brought forth or born again by the "word of truth". V. 21 says we're to receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls. And v. 22 tells us to be "doers of the word not hearers only." So, James is getting practical about anger and he instructs Christians to believe, receive and practice the word that saves their souls. This is where the text leads us to the gospel. This is where the application gets Christ centered. If you're going to be slow to speak and slow to anger you've got to slow down and humbly listen to God's word, to the gospel, for yourself. This isn't self help, two steps to freedom. This is discipleship. Yes it's a good and wise practice to listen to others more than you speak. But that's not his point here. He's saying, Christian listener, when you're angry, be sure to believe, receive, listen and do the word of God. That very word will reorder and reorient your heart when you're in the throws of anger. **Ed Welch** has very helpful words on this verse: *"The common application is that when you are in a tense conversation, you should listen before you speak, and be sure to keep any frustrations on simmer, not high boil. This is wise counsel, but it is not what James is saying. Instead, he is imploring us to be quick to listen to the word of truth (1:18)...So if anger is rising in you, don't start by trying to listen to the person in front*

of you who drives you crazy. Start with meekness before God (1:21). Don't even think about talking to another person until you have heard the word of the Lord and are silent before him."

This reminds me of what the Lord says in **Isaiah 66:2**: "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

TRANS: In order to fight against the sin of anger in your life you're going to have to do more than therapy, fitness classes and healthy relationships. You'll need to make the effort to tune your ears into God's Word and God's Gospel. That's where real and lasting change comes from. That's where we meet God and His Spirit graces us with the power to change. And as you do, watch how His Spirit works in your heart on your anger. If His word has saved your soul, it can save you from sinful anger too.

Dan Doriani: *"We should always "be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." But we should be especially quick to hear the gospel for it convicts us of sin. James contrasts the indulgence of anger with a resolve to hear and heed God's Word... By contrast, the Word convicts of sin. If the gospel grants us new life, we can and should "put away" sin that is "rampant." The term "rampant" suggests fast-growing weeds. If we want to uproot sin, James says the first step is to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." That is, the first step is not to work hard, but to receive God's saving truths and let them take root deep within. The power for moral reforms lies with God's Word, implanted by his Spirit."*

APP: So, when you're angry, it's probably not best to just sit and listen to people around us muse endlessly about what's on their mind. Nor would it be wise to listen to the people we're mad at, it's time, when we're angry to hear from God. But not only that. We're also told to receive the implanted word with meekness. Meaning we're to

take it in with a humble posture as a son under our Father who bestows good gifts on us. We're also told put away some evils that tend to spring up when we're angry. Rampant wickedness and all filthiness. When we're angry we tend to do and say things that are wicked and filthy. I think he's referring to moral filth here.

TRANS: Now we're ready to consider the bullseye of this passage. V.20. What does it mean when it says: *"the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God"*?

In other words, what is anger useless for? I mean you could argue that anger is actually very useful to destroy things and do many evil deeds. If you want to be a soldier in war, you'll need to learn to use anger as a weapon to defeat your enemy. If you're a boxer or MMA fighter, you'll normally use anger to get in the combat mindset. When I used to play football I'd tap into my anger at each play. If you ever want to see angry men watch a football game. Each play terminates with epic hits; acts of violence in the name of sport. But of course I'm a Christian preaching to encourage Christians towards much higher and better goals. The war we're engaged in is the battle against our own sin. In fact, us Christians have a great big goal for each day, we make it our aim to please the Lord. And to do this anger is useless. It's useless to produce righteousness that pleases the Lord. Sinful man's anger does not help us meet that goal.

So to understand this passage we first need to understand that Paul and James use righteousness in two different ways. I think James has the righteous life or lifestyle of one living by faith here, not that forensic or legal "righteousness" that we see Paul use in say Romans and Galatians. *James' use here is closer to the usage of righteousness in the OT or in the life of Christ where we see a righteous person is living by and for the will of God, according to His standards.* The anger of man, or we could say, our anger doesn't lead me to obey the will of God. My anger leads me to

do my own thing. My anger leads me away from the will of God. Often times my anger leads to unwise unwholesome and unholy speech, and even vile practices such as violence. *Our anger so quickly goes from an evaluation, an emotion then it gets warped and twisted on its way out of me.* The problem with my anger is that I'm often angry at the wrong person's sin! I rarely get angry at my sin. I'm almost always angry at someone else's sin.

"There is a place for anger against sin, as we see when Jesus cleansed the temple. But most human anger is trivial, misdirected, and selfish, so it brings no "righteousness."

"The self reliant anger of man, even when directed against some wrongdoing, fails to recognize that mere human reproach cannot change another person's heart, and thus it does not produce the righteousness of God; nor indeed is such anger fully righteous itself." **There's always a trace of sin in what we do and touch. B/c sin has soaked all the way through us.**

TRANS: Now that we see the uselessness of anger. I hope we're seeing our need to put anger away. Next, we'll look at a Biblical case study of anger gone wild and wrong. In the life of the first brothers. In the story of Cain and Abel. Here we'll see the face of hate. *We'll also see how the conflict, the enmity or hostility between the righteous seed of the woman and the unrighteous seed of the serpent is playing out.* So turn with me to Genesis 4 where we'll learn that:

2. Our anger (if left unchecked) damages others and dishonors God. (Genesis 4:1-16)

TEACH: Now we need to set the scene for this story. You'll have to remember where we are in the Bible now. We're at the very beginning. We're in the beginning chapters of the Bible. We're in the beginning of Genesis which is the origin of humanity. And in

Genesis we see the origins of things, we see the seeds of things that spring up later. And what we just saw in Adam and Eve is that sin has started to spread through them to mankind and we're going to see those seeds grow and spring up in this story. *"The Sin that Adam and Eve brought into the world passes on to their son Cain. In ch.4 it leads to envy and violence that results in the murder of one brother by another."* Adam and Eve have just sinned against God. Then they had children, two sons; Cain and Abel. The first brothers in the Bible. Abel gives us an example of faith and righteousness. Cain on the other hand gives us an example of mankind plunging deeper into sin expressing it with anger that leads to murder. Here is the first murder in the Bible. Not far into the story and we already see violent results.

TRANS: Let's read from v.1-7: Genesis 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

TEACH: In these verses we see a contrast between Cain and Abel. We see two different offerings. We see that the Lord accepted one but not the other. We see that God was pleased with one and not the other. And why is that? Well, Hebrews 11:4 sheds light on this when, it says; "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."

And Hebrews 11:6 tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

TEACH: So the offering that Abel brought was more acceptable b/c of his faith. But the drama is just getting started. B/c when God disapproved of Cain and his offering he became "angry". And his face fell. Meaning his demeanor and disposition, even changed. Yes sin does come from the heart but it affects our bodies too. His face fell and he became upset, some even see a depression-like response in him. Perhaps. And perhaps that's b/c Cain actually wanted to please the Lord. But the events that follow show that, like our anger, his anger started when a desire for something good wasn't met. His desire to please the Lord with his offering was good. But that good desire morphed and mutated into demands and evil deeds. His response to God's Word and assessment was sinful and sinister. Look at v.6-7

⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, and you must rule over it."

TEACH: This is wisdom for real life. Notice that God doesn't pander to Cain, giving him what he wants. He doesn't say, "oh you poor guy, cheer up!" Rather, the Lord questioned Cain as to why he's angry then He shows him, that if he did well, he'd be accepted. I see mercy in these words. Cain still has the opportunity to turn around and possibly even please the Lord. But this will require coming to God on His terms. He'll have to stop giving into sin and instead he'll have to do well and rule over it. To please the Lord and be accepted by Him he needs to say no to sin and like his brother overcome its dominating power and rule over it. Sin in this passage is likened to a wild beast that must be tamed and mastered or else. The language is epic, "sin is

crouching at the door". The idea is clear, it's ready to pounce on you if you open the door and let it in. Well, Cain opened the door wide to sin. He was apparently unwilling to accept this stipulation from God. And as we see in what follows sin overpowered him and he in turn overpowered his own brother. He goes down in history as the first murderer and as you'll see this is a case of cold hard first degree murder...against brother!

⁸ *Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."* ¹³ *Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."*

TEACH: Now why did Cain take it out on his brother? Well, 1 John 3:12: "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."

Cain is the villain in this story. It seems he was not only angry but possibly even jealous at his brother. So he killed him. Proving that his deeds were evil and his loyalty was not to God but to the evil one, the devil. In contrast Abel goes down as others did, as one who was righteous yet was killed at the hands of evil men. Here again is the conflict b/n the descendants of the righteous and the wicked. Cain

couldn't stand his upright brother. Proverbs 29:27: "An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked."

TRANS: Notice that while God moves against Cain and his sin, He still moves towards Him. Confronting him after he kills Abel In v.9-10, God asks Cain where his brother went, you see

Ironically here we see a villain play the victim after he feels the weight of his sin on his shoulders.

¹⁵ *Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*

V.9; "When the Lord confronts Cain with his crime, his coldhearted nature causes him to deny any knowledge about his brother. Cain shows no sign of remorse."

V.13-16, "Cain is immediately conscious of the severity of his punishment. He is to be alienated from both the ground and God."

Hebrews 12:24: "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

NIV ZONDERVAN BIBLE:

V.9, "Cain's callous and deceptive response contrasts with Adam and Eve's naive and evasive responses 3:10-13).

V.10, "Abel represents the first of a long line of faithful people who die and cry out for vengeance; in contrast, Jesus' innocent blood provides mercy (Hebrews 12:24)."

V.14, "The penalty for murdering the innocent is death (Deut. 19:11-13)."

V. 15 "God marked by Cain for his safety (see Ezekiel 9:4 for another protective mark)."

- **The Mercy: Despite the severity of the crime, God places a mark on Cain for protection, demonstrating that judgment is tempered with mercy.**

STUDY Bible: "Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel because it is an invitation to forgiveness, not a cry for vengeance."

3. **Our Savior atoned for our sinful anger on the cross.**

TEACH: His act at once pleased God and provided forgiveness of sins for us who believe. That is failures who fail to obey God when it comes to anger. Whether you fail to put off anger, slander, bitterness. Or if you've had an abortion, harassed, harmed or maybe even abused or killed someone. Jesus is the Only Savior for sinners such as you. Such as me. There's no one else who can possibly save our soul. *No one else perfectly acted against the anger of sinners and died for angry sinners.* His life death and resurrection show that there was a true and better man who did not fail and fall down into sinful anger. Rather He shows us the perfect human the fully human, who kept anger in its proper place. He perfectly acted against the sin of anger all His life. Ultimately facing it and dying for it on the cross. Never giving into it's power.

Always maintaining perfect obedience to God and always maintaining dominion over the sin of anger.

"But at no point does the Bible suggest that offerings work automatically, as if the worshiper's faith and contrition did not matter; and Cain's fundamentally bad heart can be seen in his resentment toward his brother and in his uncooperative answers to God in the rest of the passage. Several NT texts derive legitimate inferences from this narrative, namely, that Cain demonstrated an evil heart by his evil deeds, while Abel demonstrated a pious heart by his righteous deeds (1John 3:12); and that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and was commended as righteous for that reason (Heb.11:4)." (ESV STUDY BIBLE)

TEACH: We have a better word that God is pleased with us through faith in Jesus.

It shows the words' effects on our soul and the uselessness of anger.

The importance of throwing away anger and taking in the word of God.

The context is on the goodness of God the power of His word and the importance of acting upon it. The problem is that anger does not produce good and wholesome effects in me or others.

Take the word in instead of stewing in wickedness and pouring out your anger on others.

The anger of Jesus was perfectly expressed against sin. And the anger of man was sinfully expressed against Christ, climactically at the cross. But at the cross, Christ was putting the power and penalty of sinful anger to death. The cross was as some have said the mouse trap for the devil. The place where He thought He won, but instead Christ's indestructible life and resurrection power broke His neck and crushed his power over those who believe.

Do you regularly flip out on loved ones? Have you suffered with the regret of your anger's evil effects? Do you see your anger as a sin against the Holy God? If so, do repent of your anger. Do start by confessing your anger to God and to other trusted people. You cannot take control of it in your own strength. You will need the Lord to empower you over your sinful impulses to rage and get revenge on others.

God moves towards his people as he moves against their sin. ***