**Anger**

**Message 8**

**Memory Verse:**

**James 1:18,19** *My brothers, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. For anger does not bring about the righteousness of God.*

*When my daughter was about 5 years old she did something that made me mad.  Rather than be the good, good father that God wanted me to be I responded in anger. My expression, or countenance clearly showed this as she got a terrified look on her face and said, “Daddy, you have a very mad face!” Unrelenting,  I lit into her about what ever tiny infraction she had committed.  Looking back, it was like swallowing poison.*

*This single event haunted me for years.*

*My sin was repeated countless times until March of 2016 when she said that for her own mental health she could not longer have any contact with me until further notice. I was devastated.*

*My daughter is now 28.  Even after three times through re gen I had not linked this sin back into the need for amends until a few weeks ago.*

*I called her and reminded her of the event.  She had forgotten this one but remembered many, many others.  I was able to tell her about my regret and sorrow for so many years of verbal abuse and not being the kind of father that I wanted to be.  I asked for her forgiveness and she granted it.*

*Even though we reconciled last year there are deep wounds from my anger that need to be continuously healed.*

**Introduction**

Christian counselors report that 50% of their clients deal with anger issues. (*Michael Houdman : Got questions.org)* Anger can be devastating to everyone it touches.

We will explore whether anger is always sin?

We will explore how to control and overcome our anger.

We hope to successfully argue the value of becoming unoffendable and how such a paradigm could glorify God in amazingly powerful ways. Love is the key to transforming a resistant or rebellious heart. The application and definition of “love” and specifically loving your prodigal will be discussed in future messages, but anger is never the answer and is a counterproductive motivational tool.

Uncontrolled human anger leads to shattered relationships, damaged or non-existent communication, elimination of joy, and declining physical and/or emotional health.

**Is Anger Always a Sin?**

Almost always, but righteous anger is not.

If we study anger in the Bible then one readily sees that both God and Jesus got angry. Therefore since God is perfect (Psalm 92:15) and Jesus is without sin (Heb 4:15, II Cor 5;21) then anger must not be sin in and of itself.

Anger is simply an emotion of displeasure, sometimes intense displeasure. It can be helpful as an emotion to warn of injustice or to point out to us that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with. We can learn about non-sinful, “***righteous anger***” by looking at these scriptures.

* + Mark 3:5 *He (Jesus) looked around at them in anger, deeply distressed by their stubborn hearts*
  + Psalm 4:4 *In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.*
  + Mark 11:14 Jesus cursed the fig tree
  + Mark 11: 15-17 Jesus drove out those buying and selling in the temple

We can see from these examples and many Old Testament examples of God’s anger at Israel that such anger is directed at sin and injustice. Such righteous anger is directed at the sin, not the people.

A key point to remember is that **we are not God**. God and Jesus, in their perfection are the only ones that can handle anger appropriately. Our anger should not be harbored for long. It should be identified quickly and released.

* Eph. 4:26 *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.*
* *Ecclesiastes 7:9 Anger resides in the lap of fools*

It is important to consider that when anger is alive and well, it lives in the lap of a fool.

Righteous anger is difficult for fallen humanity to achieve as our sinful pride gets in the way. We often let our anger turn to sin as we direct it against the people who hurt us. One of Jesus’ main teaching points was to have us look at our heart and motives.

Robert Jones points out **3 Criteria for Righteous Anger** in his book, *“Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem”.* Righteous anger…

* Reacts against actual sin and an accurate perception of evil
* Focuses on God and His Kingdom, His rights and His concerns instead of my kingdom, my rights, and my concerns
* Is associated with Godly attributes such as self discipline and control. It does not contain self pity or despair nor does it withdraw from relationships

Brant Hansen in his powerful book, *Unoffendable,* makes some powerful points. “Choosing not to take offense is not about simply ignoring wrongs. If someone, say, cuts in front of you in line, you can address the situation. You don’t have to simply accept it. But you can act without contempt, anger, and bitterness.”

How can you do this? Hansen explains because no matter what anyone else has done to me, I stand just as guilty in God’s eyes. He goes on to state something humorous but sadly true. When we ask about being angry at sin, it usually means someone else’s sin! It is human nature to believe someone is worse than us. We believe everyone is an idiot, except us!

This point is worth taking a final look at. We will focus on the same passage Hansen focuses on in his book.

*As for myself, I do not care if I am judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I know of no wrong I have done, but this does not make me right before the Lord.* ***The Lord is the One who judges.*** *(emphasis mine) So do not judge before the right time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light things that are now hidden in darkness and will make known the secret purposes of people’s hearts. Then God will praise each one of them.* (I Cor. 4:3-5)

Paul is stating that was aware of his ability to even judge himself, much less others.

* God knows private matters. We don’t.
* God knows our private motives. We don’t.
* We think we can judge others’ motives, We’re wrong.

**Human, Sinful Anger**

As fallen humans we often seek to justify our anger, but we must be careful in this practice, as our anger is most often sinful and directed at those people that hurt us, rather than the sin itself. The Bible is quick to point out our tendency to self deception (Jeremiah 17:9).

Once again, we can look to the Word of Truth to discern more about sinful anger.

**How we can recognize sinful anger**

Sinful human anger is often motivated by pride. There are several ways we can recognize sinful anger.

* We are often angry because we want something we feel we deserve but don’t get it, whether that be material possessions or simply respect.
  + James 4:1,2 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it.
* It does not glorify God
  + I Cor 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
* It is allowed to linger leading to escalation and bitterness
  + Eph 4:26 in your anger to do sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.
* It attacks the person, not the sin
  + Matt. 5:22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry at his brother will be subject to judgement. …but anyone who says “you fool” will be in danger of the fires of hell.
* It involves poisonous speech
  + Psalm 39:3 My heart grew hot within me and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue
* It boils over without restraint
  + Prov. 29:11 A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control

**What are the causes of Sinful Anger?**

There are many possible causes of sinful anger.

* Pain
* Embarrassment
* Injustice
* Fear
  + Loss of security, life, money, esteem, power, prestige, reputation, relationship, love
* Frustration
  + Loss of dreams/idols/expectations/significance

If we examine the causes listed above we can all relate. It might be helpful to review this list anytime you are angry to determine its source. However, if we look a little deeper, we might see not only the root cause of our anger, but a root cause for the recurring sin in our life as well. *It has its roots in our own selfish* ***pride,*** *coupled with a* ***lack of trust in God****. Once again, we see* ***our view of God*** *critical****.*** This may seem like a harsh statement, but truth that sharpens us often stings, but can strengthen us and grow us.

We are often angry at people because they have shattered our dreams. We can be angry if their actions have caused us to fear the loss of money, reputation, relationship, or even life itself. In these instances we are not taking God at His word. God tells us in Nahum 1:7 that He is good, a refuge in times of trouble and that he cares for those who trust in Him. Jesus famously urges us in Matt. 11:28-30 to come to him if we are weary and burdened in any way and He alone will give us the rest our souls are longing for. He reminds us in Prov. 21:31 that we should be diligent and faithful but the final outcome of any and all situations are under His control alone.

***If we do not trust God for the final outcome of our current situation as well as our eternity, then we place ourselves in charge and responsible.*** That weight is enormous, if not impossible. We try to enforce justice as we see fit. We then try to control the situation and rescue our prodigals. This will eventually lead to frustration and the very anger we are trying to avoid. Such anger interferes with the righteousness that God desires of us. (James 1:18,19)

**Anger’s Ill Effects : Our tongue**

As stated, anger can be useful if identified as a useful emotion that warns us of trouble that must be dealt with. If we deal with then deal with the trouble Biblically but release the anger then God can be glorified. However, if sinful anger continues to “rest in our lap”, then *usually manifests through our tongues*. Our mothers taught us this popular childhood adage. “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That should be the case for those who are secure in Christ, but often this is the furthest thing from reality. Words do hurt and they are very, very important to God. The scriptures point out the importance of the tongue and controlling it.

* Psalm 39:3 *My heart grew hot within me and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue. “*
* James 1:26 *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*
* James 3:5,6 *Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*
* James 3:8,9 *but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made in our likeness*.
* Matt 12:34-37 …*how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.*
* Prov 10:19 *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*
* Prov. 17:27 *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even tempered*

**What is our Purpose in Using our Tongue to sin in anger?**

We do not often think about why we power up in anger. What purpose are we trying to accomplish? We often want to get control back and restore order or respect. We are threatened and want to gain some sense of security. We can often feel minimized, so we want to regain significance, or the love we so desperately need and desire. In our sin we may also want to simply seek to inflict the pain that has been inflicted on us. It is helpful to stop and analyze anger outbursts to determine their purpose. If it does not align with your Personal Biblical mission statement then it is most likely damaging and not productive.

**What Does Sinful Anger Do?**

In our anger we often say things in cruel, unloving ways. We can even say things we don’t really mean, but in our anger, we seek to hurt those who have hurt us. Even if we do speak truth, our anger often relays this truth in a reckless and overly hurtful way. Such anger stops or severely damages all communication, which leads to broken relationships and isolation. Such isolation is right where Satan wants us, where he can whisper lies in our ears that falsely justify our actions. Progress and reconciliation cannot occur when communication is damaged or non-existent.

**God’s Communication Instruction**

Once a discussion escalates to angry communication, listening is eliminated in most instances. We are encouraged in James 1:18,19 to emphasize listening over speaking and to guard against anger diligently as no good comes from it, ever. Proverbs 29:22 points out that an angry man stirs up dissension and commits many sins. Prov. 29:20 says there is more hope for a fool than for one who speaks without thinking, which is certainly more likely to occur when emotional and angry.

Fortunately God does not just tell us what to avoid in our speech but gives us direction on how to talk in these situations. Ephesians 4:29 states, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.”* I Peter 3:15 tells us to always be ready to speak truth, but do so with gentleness and respect.

As we can see, spoken words are extremely important to God and we will be accountable to Him for every careless one spoken. This should give us great pause to control both our anger and our tongue.

**How Can We Overcome Anger**

Anger is simply one sin among many. We overcome sin only through faith in Jesus Christ (john 3:16), but we battle sin only through a proper view of God. Anger is no different. We must see ourselves as the wretched sinners we are that are as guilty as our brothers and sisters who are causing us to be angry. We must realize we are saved by God’s grace alone through the sacrifice of His son. The proper perspective of our identity with and without Christ directs our PMS. A Biblically based PMS should direct us to glorify Him in all we do. If our PMS guides us then glorifying God will lead to forgiveness and love rather than anger. It is difficult as humans to do all the time but it is just that simple. Only God can judge rightly and only God can handle anger perfectly. So give it to Him. Christ calls on us to take up our cross daily, which means dying to self (pride/fear/guilt, idols,etc) and living for Him. Look at this reminder from God.

*“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”* (Ephesians 4:31–32).

Matthew Henry has wise words from his commentary on this passage

*If you have a just occasion to be angry at any time, see that it be without sin; and therefore take heed of excess in your anger.” If we would be angry and not sin (says one), we must be angry at nothing but sin; and we should be more jealous for the glory of God than for any interest or reputation of our own.*

**Can we have “Righteous” Prodigal Anger?**

Of course we can have righteous anger in our Prodigal situation just as Matthew Henry eloquently describes. We must realize that **our Prodigal’s battle is against sin, not us.** If we can realize that this battle in not against flesh and blood but again the powers in the heavenly realms, then we can be angry at Satan and sin itself. (Ephesians 6)

We can realize that victory can be aided through prayer, which we then begin to practice more diligently and faithfully. We will realize through the study of his Word that loving our Prodigals involves setting proper boundaries, enforcing consequences and giving up control to God, trusting in Him and His promises. We can then love our Prodigal well and finally let go of the anger that destroy us. ***Love in the broadest sense is what will bring our Prodigal home, not anger.***

**Personal Testimony about my struggle with Anger**

In the Prodigal ministry, we urge you to *release your control and trust God*. We as you to “Lay your Isaac down” in reference to the beautiful and powerful story told in Genesis 22. This concept is the most difficult obstacle to overcome in our Prodigal journey, but without doing so, you will never find the peace and joy God desires. We also believe that “laying your Isaac down” is a critical step to aid your Prodigal in their recovery, as difficult as that is to comprehend initially. It is one step to understand the concept and realize its importance. Once realized, the next step is usually saying you have let go, but for most of us, it takes several attempts before we truly release that control. For me, I remember vividly exactly where I was when I read this quote from Frederich Buechner, taken from his book, “*Wishful Thinking*”. He wrote,

*“Of the Seven Deadly Sins,* ***anger*** *is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor the last toothsome morsel, both the pain you are given and the pain your are giving back. In many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you”.*

For you, it may be something else that turns the light bulb on and allows you to finally let go and trust God with your Prodigal. However, for me, this was my moment. When I read this passage, I realized I was angry and had never identified it or acknowledged it. I was angry for hopes and dreams that had been shattered. I was angry that he was negatively impacting my time, my joy, and my energy. I saw my skeleton on the table. I realized that skeleton could not lead himself and his family well. That skeleton could not glorify God in this chaos. The only thing I could do was let go and love him for the sinner he was, just like me. I realized my all consuming preoccupation with him and the real anger I was denying was not impacting his journey at all. He was doing what he wanted to do and my anger was not only not helping, but was harmful to me, my family, and my Prodigal! I gave him to God fully in that moment and I experienced an almost tangible weight, lifting off my shoulders. **I never parented the same again**. I was finally able to set boundaries and enforce consequences because I trusted God for the outcome. I wasn’t angry anymore.

I choose to be unoffendable and not take this personally, but rest in my identity as a totally forgiven child of the King and remind myself that Love, kindness and forgiveness is a more powerful motivator and has won more hearts than anger, fear, and revenge ever will.