

## “SEVEN SERIOUS SINS: ANGER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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**Text for the Sermon: Ephesians 4:26-31; Romans 12:17-21**

### **The meaning of anger.**

One of the most helpful books on anger is by David Powlison, *Good and Angry*. It's so good I want to read the entire second chapter to you. "Do You Have a Serious Problem with Anger?"

Yes.

That's it, maybe the shortest book chapter in history. At the end of each chapter he has some applications. At the end of this chapter he suggests going back and rereading the chapter several more times.

Do you have an anger problem? Have you ever had smoke coming out your ears or been red in the face or raised your voice? If you are human the answer is yes.

From our two texts we learn there are three kinds of anger.

*First*, there is God's kind of anger called *the wrath of God* (Romans 12:19). God's wrath is an expression of His holiness and justice. His wrath is perfect and pure and righteous and justified. It is always completely under control and never sinful.

*Second*, being made in the image of God there is a way in which humans can also have a *righteous anger*, especially in the face of gross injustice and assaults on God's character and nature. We carry in us a sense of what's right and wrong, just and unjust. Paul says it is possible to be angry and not sin (Ephesians 4:26).

In fact it would be a sin if Christians never got angry about injustice, abortion, domestic violence, abusing and distorting sex, dishonoring marriage, mocking God and His Word.

*Third, there is sinful anger*, the last of the seven serious sins we have been considering.

We could easily spend three sermons on these three kinds of anger, but I am only going to focus on the anger that affects us all the most, our sinful anger, what James refers to as, "the anger of man [that] does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

This is a *universal* sin. Everyone sins this sin. Anger is cross cultural, it respect no ages or peoples or positions. Anger may be the very first sin each of us ever commits as an infant. The youngest children can fly into a rage and throw epic temper tantrums over food, bedtimes, Legos, and Rainbow Dash. I wonder if the candy and toy aisles in stores are ever get completely dry of tears?

And we never outgrow anger. All of us adults have moments when something becomes unacceptable to us whether it's our kid's behavior, our spouses words, our bosses demands or some situation or obstacle in life.

We all get angry, but we express it differently. Some of us are volcanos and some are icebergs, blowing up or clamming up, spew or stew. Both are sin.

**Hot anger** is easily and quickly sparked, a quick temper that flies into a rage over the slightest provocation.

**Cold anger** is the hidden resentment, bitterness, calculating anger. This is the one who keeps score, keeps records, remembers for a long time and never forgets.

**Root causes.**

**Anger is generally a secondary emotion.** There is a primary underlying emotion that is the trigger. Trying to determine that underlying cause or source is the key to coming to grips with our anger.

We all wear a mask, we all hide behind a façade. Anger is the emotion that rips that mask off and exposes what's in our hearts. Anger tells us what's going on inside of us. Anger is a whistle-blower emotion, it rats us out. Anger is symptomatic of something else.

Jonah's anger exposed his lack of love for the Ninevites. He was mad that God showed mercy to such a hated enemy.

**James 4:1-2** What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have.

We become angry when something happens that we find unacceptable or undesirable, and we can't easily fix it or make it acceptable, or let go of it.

When we see a child or a spouse or friend angry what is the natural first question? "Why are you angry?" We naturally know there's a reason behind the anger and it helps if we can get to the root.

At its root anger is selfish pride. My angry response says something I care about is threatened. It might be my selfish desires, my time, my convenience, my comfort, my wishes, my pride, my security, my reputation, my ego or my sense of authority.

Anger is sinful self-interest directed against whatever or whoever interferes with me and what I desire. Lust reduces people to objects, anger reduces people to obstacles.

If we are cut off in traffic, or rudely insulted, or have our idea shot down, or are unappreciated by our spouse, or snubbed by a friend, or not invited, or passed by, and we become angry, it may be because we love ourselves too much, or are thinking too self-centeredly.

*So what? What is so bad about anger?*

**Galatians 5:20-21** idolatry, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 ... and things like these. I warn you ... those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Wrath is spiritually dangerous and should be taken seriously every time. It dishonors God, grieves the Holy Spirit, damages relationships, gives Satan a foothold, hinders our spiritual growth, especially our prayers, and if not dealt with and repented of will keep us out of heaven.

Anger is deadly. To paraphrase one writer, "Unforgiveness (and anger and bitterness) is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die."

**The measure of Anger. Anger Test.**

Are you willing to do a button check. What pushes your buttons and why are those buttons important?

Are you willing to ask God to test you and see if there be any angry way in your heart? Here is a sampling of questions to help us get to the heart of the anger in our hearts (some from Jared C. Wilson).

Do you get angry often, or easily? When you get angry does it get intense?

Are you quick tempered, hot headed? Or do you hold it in, but boil inside?

Are you known for being argumentative or defensive?

Do you have difficulty letting go of personal hurts or resentment?

Do you have to get the last word?

Are there people you refuse to talk to because you feel angry with them?

Do you get so upset you withdraw, give silent treatment, avoid?

In arguments with your friends, family, or spouse, are you able to focus on the issue at hand and be reasonable, or do your emotions lead you to say things that hurt?

Do you take your anger out on others, something, the door, the dog, cat or cow?

Do you sometimes yell or raise your voice to get your point across?

If you're in a position of authority over others, such as employees, students, or children, do you find it difficult to correct or discipline without venting anger?

Do you replay negative experiences over and over in your mind?

Do you often think that other people are a bunch of idiots, people who "just don't get it"?

Do you think about getting even or taking revenge on others?

Does the very idea of forgiveness make you angry?

A YES answer to any one of the questions indicates the presence of problem anger.

## **The Methods against madness.**

**Ephesians 4:31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

We often hear advice like take a breath, sit down, calm down, count to ten. That's a start, but those just control the symptoms, anger is still a heart problem, so it requires deeper work.

**First**, examine your heart and identify your idols. God blesses those who ask for help. Ask God to show you the idols in your life that spark or fuel you anger, the idols that are too important to you and put you on the defensive.

Ask God to show you your heart as He did Jonah when He asked Jonah, "What do you have to be angry about?"

What makes me angry?

What deep desires are being denied me?

What personal rights am I claiming are being trampled on?

What do I want that I am not getting and why is it so important?

What self-centered, selfish desire or need when not met, ticks me off?

Ask yourself why you lose your temper or say something mean or harsh, or become so frustrated or agitated. Take some time to think about this and reflect on it.

**Second**, once you have identified the root causes, the sinful desires and the idols of the heart, then comes the **funeral**. We have to start dying to ourselves and our selfish wants and desires, start killing what is sin and burying it with the shovel of confession and repentance.

Yes, you have to say the words over and over, "I am sorry, I have sinned in my words and actions and attitude. It was wrong before God and you. I have hurt you. Please forgive me."

Don't just say you are sorry for what happened, something didn't just happen. Say you are sorry for what you did or what you said. Get real, get honest.

Don't say, "Well, you made me angry." No, you chose to respond in anger. Own your actions, own your sin. It is the shortest and quickest path to healing and restoration and reconciliation.

Repentance is our way of saying that we agree with God about what sin is and that we are sinners and we have sinned and need forgiveness. Repentance is for when we fall down and now we want to get up and start walking the path of obedience again. Repentance is medicine for our sick souls. Keep repenting and seeking reconciliation.

**Third**, receive the **forgiveness** of God and freely give and receive it with others.

**Psalms 103:8** The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God doesn't keep a record of wrongs.

**Psalms 103:10** He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

God doesn't get even, He forgives.

**Psalm 103:12** As far as the east is from the west  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

God's forgiveness is wider than the universe.

**Colossians 2:13-14** ... having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt  
that stood against us ... nailing it to the cross.

“My sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more.”

Let the grace and forgiveness of God do its work to transform your heart, bringing about a more  
Christ like character in us. Receive the Gospel and give the Gospel.

The bigger the offense or hurt the more forgiveness we need to give, but the harder it is. It  
takes grace which is only something God can give. So again we must ask Him for it.

**Fourth**, trust God to repay, let it go. Letting go takes a deep trust in God to handle things and  
get it right. Do you trust Jesus with the most vulnerable, painful hurts of your life?

Consider the example of the **Amish** who over the years have experienced some terrible crimes  
and before a watching world, forgive those who have hurt them or killed their loved ones.

Let the power of Romans 12:17-21 work in your heart and home and relationships.

Don't add evil to evil. Don't double the evil, but cut it in half, in so far as it depends on you. If  
you add evil to evil you become an evil doer and now you are on the wrong team, playing  
against God. Believe me when I say that will not go well for you.

This is another way of saying that no matter how bad a situation is, you can always make it  
worse by giving in to the temptations of vengeance, hatred, bitterness and maliciousness.

Whatever you do, stay away from the rat poison.

**Finally**, love others more than yourself.

**Take parenting as an example.** One of the most consistent causes of my anger was the  
disobedience of my kids. Disobedience is a sin, it is a real problem that parents must address.  
But how we address it makes all the difference.

If we love our children then we will see the danger of disobedience, it is folly in the heart of a  
child and if left it leads to rebellion first against parents and then all authority and finally  
against God.

If I love my child more than myself then my anger will be controlled, I will discipline with patience, careful to communicate my love and care, and the sinfulness of their heart. The discipline will be both loving and painful, and in the end fruitful.

But if I love myself more than my child, I will discipline in anger because I am being inconvenienced or embarrassed by their disobedience, then my discipline will be impulsive, angry, disproportionate, about what I want and what is best for me and not for them.

***Think about God's parenting.*** God is our Father and we are His children. God has anger and feels anger, but what directs His anger? Love. God is love and God acts in love. God's wrath always works for our good, He hates what is bad for us, sin, disobedience, rebellion. God hates the enemies of our soul. God hates what robs us of our true joy. He only disciplines in love.

I am not naïve about hurt and pain and offenses and being wronged. I could tell you stories and how those thoughts come back to me from time to time and I have to stop them and drain them of any power over me by praying for God's forgiveness and God's blessing on them. I want it for myself, I must be willing to give it to others. They need it too.

Look at the cross. God held up a mirror to show us what are hearts are really like, hatefully rebellious against Him, God could have taken out vengeance on us all, but He showed us His heart of love and forgiveness.

Anger doesn't have to have the last word. If Jesus can say from the cross, "Father, forgive them" then we in our own petty offenses and hurts can say, "Father, forgive them too."

Who are you angry with? Toward whom are you harboring bitterness? No one on this planet has sinned against you more than you have sinned against God, and God is willing to forgive you if you ask. Who do you need to forgive? Take a concrete step toward healing a hurt or letting go of an offense or a hatred. Make a visit or a call or write a note. Pursue them, seek reconciliation.

Don't let the sun go down on you anger. Don't let it become ingrained, entrenched, take root, turn into bitterness. Bitterness grows out of undealt with anger.

Resolve by the Holy Spirit's power to be a person who is slow to speak and slow to anger and slow to gossip and slow to criticize and quick to listen and quick to forgive.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, our feelings are so strong and quick to overwhelm us. By your Spirit do a new work, a life changing work, a transforming work. Remove the sin from our anger that we not sin against you and against those in our lives we most love. You have set an example before us in Christ, conform our ways to His ways.