

Biblical Help for the Anger in All of Us

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at GCBC on February 6, 2011

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Genesis 10 gives the table of nations that dispersed from the tower of Babel that we've been studying in chapter 11. Just to illustrate again the relevance of early Genesis to today, Genesis 10 mentions Egypt or Mizraim, which the OT will refer to over 600x. Any one heard of Egypt recently in the news? How about angry protestors all over the news? The origin and beginnings of the people of Egypt is recorded in Gen 10-11. Some of the roots of what some of the Muslims there are angry about also has roots in Genesis. Have we heard about Iraq or Iran recently? That's the geography of Gen. 10-11, the tower, etc. Have we heard about Arabs in the news? Gen 10 again traces the origins of them. Do we hear about anger and hate between Jews and Muslims? That also has its roots in Genesis 1-11, through the man introduced at the end of chapter 11, Abraham, and his descendants, notably via Ishmael and Isaac. Some of today's most intense anger and violence is rooted in Gen. If you turn back to Gen. 6, before the flood, we see anger's origin.

In our country, anger isn't decreasing anytime soon. From road rage to home rage, family feuds, workplace, anger is no stranger to us. Anger is an issue in the church today. One week ago Sunday a story came through MSNBC about another church just 7 days ago:

Dozens of police break up brawl at NC church

'Authorities say a dispute over leadership at a church in western North Carolina turned from angry words to fist fights. About 30 police officers from five agencies were called to break up fights Sunday at Greater New Zion Baptist Church in Fletcher, about 94 miles west of Charlotte. Henderson County Sheriff's Capt. Jerry Rice says the brawl is under investigation and no one appears to have been seriously hurt. Rice says there were about 75 people at the church when police arrived, but not all of them were scuffling. [not what Jude had in mind when he said "contend for the faith"!] Church members are divided over the recent ouster of the Rev. LeVonia Ray as pastor of the church. The fighting apparently began over whether a vote should be held to reinstate him. No charges have been filed.' [Associated Press release, 1/31/11]

Closer to home this past week in our community in the news there was an act of deadly violence in our local public elementary school with a principal gunned down by an employee who was allegedly angry and who was arraigned just 2 days ago on murder charges. Pray for that situation. I'm personally praying I will have some opportunity to minister the gospel soon to the family in some way.

We need the worldview of Genesis 1-11 to make sense of all that, to understand why the world is the way it is, and its only hope.

Genesis 6:11 *Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence.* [where does this come from? Our world has its theories ...]

v. 5 the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

We've been looking at the world after the flood in chapter 11 the last couple times we've been in our Genesis series, the divisions of people that began at the flood and that continue to this day, the sin that began in early Genesis and still impacts us today. The sin of anger, whether it manifests in violence or murder or not, is not a problem with man's environment. The new world that was purged by a flood didn't solve man's problem, a problem that goes much deeper than outward manifestations of sin, anger, hatred, etc. We know it's not an environmental problem because in Gen. 8:21 God says right after the flood "*the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth*" – man's heart and nature wasn't washed away by the water. What God sees and says is the heart of man's problem is a problem with man's heart, as Gen. 6:5 says, the radical depravity within us.

Our world likes to think people go bad because of environment or the evil influences in the world, that kids go bad because of others, but if you look back at Gen. 4, the first two kids, there were no others to blame why Cain went bad, no public school to blame, no violent video games to blame, no naughty neighbor boys to blame, no dysfunctional family to blame (his parents were as close to perfect as you'll ever get, they once actually were perfect, and had literally walked with the Lord and talked with Him face-to-face).

In Gen. 4:5 it says God did not approve of Cain's offering. "... So Cain became **very angry** and his countenance fell. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "**Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?**" ⁷ "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, **sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.**" ⁸ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Sin, and this sin of anger in particular, wants to rule you, but you must rule it. Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you, John Owen said. Or as Paul said, we're not to let any sin be our master, and there is something about anger in particular that tends to master us. It's not just about outward expressions, the Lord looks at the heart.

Those who lose the battle on the outside have already first lost the battle on the inside. This is so important for us to understand, for the nature of our own hearts and sin, and if parents, our children's. If we do not control sin within, in the heart, it will control the life. You need to be able to overcome angry feelings or those feelings will overcome you. Sin wants to control you, you must control it. If we do what the Lord tells us to (v. 7) there is grace and blessing.

There's much more we could look at in this foundational passage on anger, and Gen. 1-11 has foundational truth for just about every major subject or doctrine in Scripture in some way, but for tonight, I want us to actually spend the rest of our time not in Genesis 4 but in Ephesians 4 and James 4. [CLICK HERE](#) for handout introduced in this message, which next message will cover.

Robert Jones writes in *Uprooting Anger* (p. 9-10): Scripture generates hope for angry people like us. This is welcome news because, as seasoned counselors know, nearly every relational conflict involves anger issues. God's Word gives us all that we need to handle this universal problem.'

If you really want to study this subject further than we can today, that's the best book I know to recommend: *Uprooting Anger*. By God's grace this evening, my prayer is that His Word will help us get to the root of our anger and find deep lasting help to change.

1. Defining your anger (Eph. 4:26-32)

We need to start with some definitions and pre-suppositions. Is it a sin to be angry? What would you say?

Ephesians 4:26 *BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

Is it possible to be angry and not sin? Any biblical examples?

How would you define righteous anger vs. unrighteous anger?

Biblical counselor David Powlison has seven questions to help us:

1. Do you get angry about the right things?
2. Do you express your anger in right ways?
3. How long does your anger last?
4. How controlled is your anger?
5. What motivates your anger?
6. Is your anger "primed and ready" to respond to another person's habitual sins?
7. What is the effect of your anger?

Jones defines godly or righteous anger as (p. 29):

- reacting against actual sin against God's Word, focusing on God, His Kingdom, His rights, His concerns (not me, mine)
- accompanied by other godly qualities and expressing itself in godly ways.

Now, in v. 26, even if we are righteously angry, what is the caution? What can happen if we don't heed this warning? We're not to let the sun go down on it, in other words, deal with it right away so it doesn't become a bigger problem, deal with it in our heart and with others. And even if we are righteously angry, how we respond must still meet God's righteous standards:

²⁹ *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.* ³⁰ *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

Sinful anger, whether articulated, or in attitudes or actions, grieves the Holy Spirit within us. Some may think they're doing pretty good on the anger front. And that's because our definition of anger is different than the Bibles, in many cases. We may think anger is a really angry person we know, or a tantrum, or a physically violent man, therefore we don't have an anger problem.

But *blowing up* is only one expression of anger. Another type is *clamping up* (quiet, inner, slow boil). Some would never physically retaliate, but they assume they're ok if they just verbally retaliate with little sarcasms and insults, or withdraw or do little things, less flagrant actions to retaliate. But Jesus never taught those less violent or less explosive versions of anger are any less sinful in God's eyes than the most extreme outward actions.

Matthew 5 ²¹ *"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'* ²² ***"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.***

I'd say that's pretty serious to our Lord. Whether we say those things to the person or think them, whether we actually do physical harm or just verbal harm, or even just wish them harm in our heart – Jesus says that's sin worthy of hell-fire. In Ephesians 4:27, Paul says anger that is not uprooted before the next day is actually giving a place for the devil in some way in our life.

2. Discerning your heart

It's important to remember that the mind and heart in biblical language are much more closely related than English ("as a man *thinks in his heart...*"). I'm using heart and mind as synonymously as the seat of desires or the fountain of all of life (Prov. 4:23). In order to get to the heart of our anger, we need to discern how our anger is a problem in our heart, that's the heart of our problem. The outward conflict or eruption is just a symptom of the inward. By the inspiration of God, James 4 puts its finger on the heart of the matter by addressing what's the matter with our heart in anger – similarly to the question God asked Cain "why are you angry"?

James 4:1–2 (NAS) ¹ ***What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*** ² *You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are **envious** and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.*

James 4:1–2 (NIV) ¹ ***What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?*** ² ***You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight ...***

A. Recognize your inner desires – the _____ROOT_____ problem

God's Word says the "source" or "cause" or your conflicts is "your desires" (NIV) or "desires for pleasure" (NKJV). The Greek word is *hedone* that we get the English word hedonism from; pleasure-seeking, a desire to please self rather than to please Christ, pursuit of happiness for myself, what I want, how I want it, when I want it.

And when I don't get it -- that's the real root cause for my conflicts and quarrels. The source of all your conflicts and quarrels is inside you, not anything or anyone outside of you. The real cause is in you. Your true problem is you, my problem is me. We cannot minimize, rationalize, or merely externalize our sin – we must take personal responsibility and deal with our hearts.

The battleground of the heart/mind/soul is where the fight must be fought and won, on the level of thoughts and desires. Paul talked about taking our very thoughts captive to make them obey Christ. If we don't defeat and subdue and keep our desires under control, fleshly desires will defeat us, subdue us, and control us.

The problem is not wanting things, we will always want and hope for things, the problem is wanting them so bad we sin if we don't get it (sinful speech or sinful attitudes, complaining, moping, we may not be violent, just give them silent treatment, cold shoulder, some sort of punishment / retaliation whether actual or attitudinal).

B. Repent of your inordinate desires – the ____REMEDY____ for that moment

The Puritans used the term “inordinate desire” for this problem, and the surest way you know when a desire has become inordinate is by how you respond if you don't get it. Do you sin when you don't get what you want, or do you sin *in order to get* what you want (manipulation, insinuation, intimidation, provocation)?

Don't just repent of the fruit, the end result. Confess what's really going on in your heart, in your desires that have displaced God's.

C. Re-orient yourself to God's desires – the ____REMEDY____ for the future

In His grace, God frustrates our desires that have taken the place that only He should have in our hearts. And in His grace He gives us this passage so that next time we have conflict or quarrels, we'll remember that no matter what the circumstance was or what the statement was of another person, God has grace for our deepest sin. We'll look at some of those helps on our outline further next time, but I want to make sure I leave with you with some hope and help from James.

3. Dealing with the heart of your anger (James 4:6-12)

Verse 6 says God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. He gives more grace or greater grace, greater than our sin, grace that can cleanse within, getting to the heart of the matter

⁶ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” ⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord ...

And as you do so, know there is great grace He gives to the humble.