

Anger Of Man

James 1:19-21

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for 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. (James 1:19-21 (ESV))

As we return to these words of God given through the Apostle James, I feel compelled all over again to remind us that God was very purposeful in His choosing of the writers of His scripture, here being James, the biological half-brother of the Lord Jesus. For reasons that He alone knows about, He poured His Holiest of truths through a very selective group of men, men with varied mindsets and personalities, solely for our benefit, blessing us by our then being able to better relate to what would otherwise be incomprehensibly pure and holy “inspired” truths and concepts.

And these words of scripture truly are “inspired”, “breathed out” by God Himself into the minds of each writer. Those words in 2 Timothy 3,
16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV))

And in 2 Peter, we read how after “breathing” these truths into the minds of the writers, God then led those writers to present His truths in such a way that no reader would possibly mistake any of their meaning as coming from the mind of the individual writers. Listen,
20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
(2 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV))

All of these words of scripture come from God to us by the Holy Spirit. And if we will be faithful to surrender ourselves completely to Christ as we read and hear them, then no corruption of personal understanding will take place.

And as we said a few weeks ago, God selected James’ personality for many reasons, but it seems especially because James doesn’t “beat around the bush” with his words, and doesn’t try to “soften” their impact, as we read them. Some of us need a “direct approach”, and James provides that “directness”.

Here, he speaks about “anger”, its origins and its affects. He tells us to,
19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for 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. (James 1:19-21 (ESV))

In the language of today, these words could be said to be “in your face”, “demanding”. And they are . . . convicting each of us to examine “why” we are angry, and then to examine our ways and mannerisms and behaviors as we exhibit our anger. Because each time we “fly off the handle, whether quietly within our own minds or openly in a “rant”, our response “does not produce the righteousness of God”.

And may I give us one more caution? In Ephesians 4, we read
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. (Ephesians 4:26-27)

It seems that Christians will often debate as to whether or not their anger in a circumstance is a “righteous anger”. May I say, for myself, that I can never remember an incident in which I could claim that my anger was “righteous”. It seems instead that my anger always flows out from my wretchedness.

And here in verse 20 of our text we are receiving a clear warning,
20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
(James 1:20)

So then, as we begin our thoughts on this matter of anger, may I ask each of you personally, “Is anger a problem within your soul”? “Is anger a regular part of your nature?”

Unfortunately, there is a defensive mechanism within most all of us that reaches to answer that question in the kindest way possible, protecting ourselves from the “real truth”. But God needs for us to be honest with ourselves. And if we are truly honest, we will probably agree that there is at least some level of anger present within our soul most all of the time, packaged and expressed differently depending upon our individual personality, but there within us all the same. And God is reminding us with these words that regardless of how our anger expresses itself, it most likely will never produce the righteousness of God.

I have confessed to you on other occasions that anger has been a problem within my personality most all of my life, causing me difficulties all along the way.

From my earliest memories, I seemed to always have at least some base level of seething anger present within me, manifesting itself with impatience and insensitivity, holding everyone, including myself, accountable for every action and behavior. And having a “task oriented” personality, I often valued a completed job above the person doing that job.

I’m so thankful that in my salvation, God has been generous to me, that His Spirit now works daily within my soul to help me keep my errant ways under control. That is part of the treasure of the “Fruits of the Spirit” being present within us as believers, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control”.

Over the years, I have taken time to get to know my personality, but may I ask, “do you know yours”? These words of the Apostle James are urging us to know ourselves and to ask this question, “Do I have a problem with anger?”

Your anger may not be packaged in the same way that mine is, but again, may I strongly suggest that you probably do have at least some measure of anger within your soul that needs be dealt with. The reason that I can say that is that these words and instructions from James don’t seem to have much of an “if” within them. There seems to be an assumption within them that each of us, over our lifetimes, has accumulated a basis for anger, here described as “filthiness and rampant wickedness”. And having that foundational basis resident within us, when provoked in some way, anger erupts.

Are we consciously aware of such a foundation that has developed within us? Probably not! One of my favorite loved ones harbors long held bitterness and resentment that she would vehemently deny exists. It has found a “stronghold” within her heart. And I can hear it interlacing through most conversations.

Here, God is plainly instructing us that we need to examine ourselves carefully and to know that such a foundation of anger very likely does exist within us. And left unattended, that anger will corrupt and contaminate all the many other parts of our lives.

Let’s look carefully at these words! Verse 19,

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for 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. (James 1:19-21 (ESV))

First, note here that James addresses us, his readers, as “beloved brothers”, words that make the assumption that we are believing Christians. That’s an important distinction, because an underlying truth that governs these words is that an unbelieving mind is really not capable of discerning the nature and meaning of God’s truths. “Spiritual truths” can only be discerned through the Holy Spirit who indwells within a believing person.

That is a painful truth, because that’s why so many good, but unbelieving, people can read words such as these, and never gain from them, because they don’t perceive that these words pertain to them. How sad!

The second implication within these words is that our anger is often provoked within common daily conversations, and often instantaneously so. Verse 19,

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20 (ESV))

A short confession . . . our recent trip to Israel was so enjoyable and we will treasure all of its memories. But as will happen, on several occasions, we found reason to be provoked to anger, sometimes by fellow travelers on the airplanes, sometimes by airline personnel and by numerous others.

And even on my very last encounter with airport personnel, I found myself being provoked to anger. As we were leaving the airplane and heading towards the baggage claim area, I became separated from the others in my group. And as I was seeking directions from an airport staff member, instead of her being helpful, she took the opportunity to be unkind. My anger immediately flared within me and I responded wrongly to her. Fortunately, I did walk away before I let it get out of hand. But folks, I was angry! I didn’t want to be angry, but the presence of these conditions in verse 21 was evident.

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness (James 1: 21 (ESV))

Yes, I am convinced that the devil was very present within the whole transaction, in that girl’s behavior, and in mine. But I must remember that I am always held personally accountable for the things I say and do. And my anger will not produce the righteousness of God. And I needed to repent for my response. And I need to always be,

19 . . . quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20 (ESV))

Again, verse 21 gives us the foundation for it all, both the reasons why we become angry and the remedy for our sinful behavior. Listen!

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
(James 1:21 (ESV))

When we studied the Book of Ephesians, we spent several weeks considering what God calls the “Old Man” and the “New Man” within us. And He tells us there that, as believers we are now to “put off the old man and his ways” and to “put on the new”, the implication being that as we come into our new relationship of salvation, we unfortunately bring with us lots of our old ways, here in our text described as “filthiness and rampant wickedness” which are underlying causes of our anger. Yes, the blood of Christ is able to wash away all of our sins and all of our sinful ways, but that process is not instantaneous to the first moment of our salvation. With most of us, it is a long and sometimes arduous process.

We are saved by Christ’s blood yes, but we need also to be “sanctified”. And you and I are required to do our part in our sanctification. We are required to join in with the Spirit of Christ as He, over time, washes us clean. Listen to these words in Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 22. This is how you and I get involved.

22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

This is part of the transformation that God desires to take place within our souls, without which, we will continue to use our old ways that we brought with us from our old life, anger, frustration, arguments and on and on. But God has a much better plan and solution for our problems, we are to be transformed by a renewing of our minds.

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 (NASB))

With “precept upon precept”, God tells us how we are to become “new” in Him. It is by the presence and the power of His Holy Spirit, guiding and directing every thought and

every behavior. And then our part is to, moment by moment, humbly surrender to His “implanted words” of truth, that we begin to respond with the righteousness of Christ. Verse 21 of our text again,

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
(James 1:21 (ESV))

And we can do this folks! We are assured in 2 Peter 1 that we already have everything we need implanted within us for us to have life and godliness.

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
(2 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV))

You and I don't ever need to respond with anger and frustration. All we have to do is “meekly” surrender to His Spirit, be “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger”.

Oh, how I long for that to be my first response when those people in airport corridors are rude and I am provoked to respond in the same manner. Oh, how I long to first remember that God is at work in every circumstance of life, always wanting me to show forth His righteousness, always wanting me to enjoy His “life and godliness” even in the worst of daily frustrations.

So then,

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for 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. (James 1:19-21 (ESV))